28 OCTOBER 2024 / It’s the economy, stupid

[HALF SECOND OF SILENCE]

[BILLBOARD]

SEAN RAMESWARAM (host): What a weekend for this presidential race of ours. It started Friday in H-town with Beyoncé.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hblf_MRMLSI)*> BEYONCÉ at HARRIS RALLY: I’m not here as a celebrity; I’m not here as a politician; I’m here as a mother.*

SEAN: And someone out in Michigan might have been a little jelly?

*<CLIP> TRUMP at FRIDAY TRUMP RALLY: Kamala is at a dance party with Beyoncé.*

SEAN: KAAAAAmala.

SCORING IN – STBB 415 (BMC)  
  
SEAN: Man who refuses to say it right had another rally at Madison Square Garden Sunday night. It opened with … more jokes about brown people!

*<CLIP> TONY HINCHCLIFFE at MSG TRUMP RALLY: Like, I don’t know if you guys know this, there’s literally a floating island of garbage in the middle of the ocean right now. I think it’s called Puerto Rico.*

SEAN: But finally the former president took the stage and opened with:

*<CLIP> TRUMP at MSG TRUMP RALLY: And I would like to begin by asking a very simple question: Are you better off now than you were four years ago?*

SEAN: Because at the end of the day, everyone knows that it’s all about the economy, stupid. And nowhere is that more obvious that in Nevada, the latest in our battleground states series on *Today, Explained*.

[THEME]

JON RALSTON (CEO, editor of Nevada independent): I’m Jon Ralston. I'm the CEO and editor of the Nevada Independent – the only statewide news organization in Nevada.

SEAN: Incredible. So I imagine this is a busy time for you. Are you busy?

JON: That would be an understatement. I am trying to oversee a news organization, track early votes and deal with a newly minted teenager. So, yeah, I'm busy.

SEAN: <laughs> All right, well, let's skip the teenager for a minute here and just talk about the election. You, sir, have a reputation for calling these kinds of things in Nevada. What's it looking like just over one week out?

JON: Well, I am, I have a pretty good prediction record, but I don't do it a week out or two weeks out. I do it three days before the election.  
  
SEAN: Awwwhhh

JON: We don't have enough data to really make a prediction yet, but the Republicans are looking better in the early count than than they ever have. On the other hand, we just recently got went to a mostly mail ballot state. And so there's some thought that younger voters are going to vote later, that all of the independents and there's been an explosion of them in Nevada are going to go the Democrats way. So they haven't given up yet, but I think they're concerned.

SEAN: Can you, can you let us know just from the way the two candidates have been campaigning, how important Nevada seems to be to this 2024 presidential election?

JON: Well, I like to tell people every cycle since 2008 how much we matter, since we're one of the few battleground states. And, you know, we don't have as many electoral votes as Pennsylvania or anybody else:

*<VO> JUST SIX VOTES….*

JON: But we are really a mirror of the country demographically. Las Vegas, which is, you know, the cliche, a slot machine in every drugstore

*<SFX> CASINO AND VEGAS SOUNDS MIXED WITH ELVIS VIVA LAS VEGAS*

JON: … and there's hookers on every street corner. That just doesn't apply.

*<SFX> CASINO SOUNDS AND SONG SWIRL AND FALL*

JON: It's a demographic melting pot, a very large Hispanic population, a substantial Asian and African-American population, and a service worker economy that is both good for the Democrats and good for Trump, who likes to say ‘I love the poorly educated.’

*<SFX> TAPE*

*<CLIP> FORMER PRESIDENT TRUMP: We won with highly educated, we won with poorly educated. I love the poorly educated!*

*<SFX> TAPE*

SEAN: What are the poorly educated out there most concerned with this election season?

JON: Well, I wouldn't call them that. Donald Trump and you have. So I'm separating myself from you on this man.

SEAN: <laughs>

JON: But what they're most concerned about is what they're most concerned about everywhere else, which is the economy.

SCORING IN – Strega Nona (banger, west coast, hip hop, synth, pizzicatos, guitar mute, head nod)

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B437A28M8Ak&t=191s)*> CBS: TACO STAND OWNER: Tacos used to be what? Dollar, dollar, $1.50 after the pandemic. I mean, they don't go under 3.50 to $4 y’know?*

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cbb-ciu-qEo&t=18s)*> FOX: PERSON 1: The inflation*

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cbb-ciu-qEo&t=18s)*> FOX: PERSON 2: people have to use a credit card to, you know, pay groceries and bills. And they got to take away things that they like to do. That's not living. That's not quality of living.*

JON: We were disproportionately smashed by Covid.

*<CLIP> NEWS ANCHOR: Overnight, casinos shut their doors. You're looking at the Bellagio now boarded up. Nevada Governor Steve Sisolak asked every casino in the state and all nonessential businesses to close.*

*<CLIP> NV GOV STEVE SISOLAK: If your business brings groups of people together, it should not be open.*

JON: Las Vegas Strip, which is the economic engine of Nevada, shut down for a couple of months.

*<CLIP> WASHINGTON POST: The sounds of birds echo the strip. Downtown casinos are lit up, but the slots are shut off and the tables empty.*

JON: A lot of people lost their jobs. Unemployment was up to 30%.

*<CLIP> NEWS ANCHOR: Right now, Nevada has the highest unemployment rate in the nation, with about 1 in 4 people now unemployed.*

JON: And even though it's come down a lot, it's down to about 5%. Now, that's still one of the higher unemployment rates in the country.

*<CLIP> PERSON 3: The pandemic just, a lot of people are still recovering.*

SCORING OUT

JON: The other adjunct to that is housing. People are having trouble buying houses, renting houses, renting apartments.

*<CLIP> NEWS ANCHOR: Washoe County has seen the median home price spike from 150,000 in 2011 to more than 500,000 now*

JON: And that is affecting, I think, a lot of lower income voters.

SEAN: And if you look at the two economic plans or policy proposals that these two candidates are pushing, it almost feels like they're talking directly to Nevada voters, doesn't it?

JON: Looks like both campaigns woke up a few weeks ago and saw the numbers I'm talking about that showed housing a big issue. And so Trump essentially piggybacked off of the Republican governor here who said they just need to release more federal land.

*<CLIP> FORMER PRESIDENT TRUMP: And on that land, we're going to build housing, we're going to have housing built, and it'll be great for Nevada and it'll be great for other areas.*

JON: 87% of Nevada is federal land. And so that's one solution. And Harris has done more traditional Democratic kinds of rhetoric about helping people get into their homes, making sure people stay in their homes.

*<CLIP> VICE PRESIDENT HARRIS: My administration will provide first time homebuyers with $25,000 To help with the down payment on a new home.*

JON: But neither of them have provided really many specifics. Which is what you’d expect.

SEAN: Hm. What about the plans more targeted to say, income? I know, I know. We've got the no taxes on tips, right? Both candidates are proposing that. Is that … that feels like a Nevada thing. That feels like a Vegas thing. That feels like a service industry thing.

JON: I think you're right on all counts. Trump says that this waitress – and whether she's real or mythical, it's always hard to tell with Trump – approached him at his property here in Vegas and said, Can you do something about this?

*<CLIP> FORMER PRESIDENT TRUMP: I said to her, Let me just ask you a question. Would you be happy if you had no tax and tips? She said, What a great idea. I got my information from a very smart waitress.*

JON: Whether that happened or not, I don't know. But I think in terms of a political pander, it's a pretty smart play by the Trump campaign.

*<CLIP> FORMER PRESIDENT TRUMP: And we need to spread the word so that every time you leave a tip for the next five months, you put on the receipt “Vote for Trump because there's no tax on tips.”*

JON: The Harris campaign originally poo pooed this, but later …

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XEN0y0NaEvc)*> VICE PRESIDENT HARRIS: It’s so good to be back in Las Vegas …*

JON: … jumped on board and said, this is a great idea.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XEN0y0NaEvc)*> VICE PRESIDENT HARRIS:.... Raise the minimum wage. And eliminate taxes on tips for service and hospitility workers.*

JON: Has this cut in favor of Trump? I don't know. But I will tell you this, that in an election that could be very close, some people think it could be as close as 5 or 10,000 votes out of about 1.3 or 4 million cast, every little bit could make the difference. And it's going to be hard to say what the one issue was, the one move was that made the difference.

SEAN: Mmm. If Trump does indeed succeed and wins over Nevada, what do you think that will have said about his campaign, about his appeal when he lost there in 2016 *and* in 2020.

JON: But he didn't lose by a lot. He, he lost by two and a half points. This would say that the state has changed for the first time in two decades, in 2022 we elected a Republican governor, that Republicans now can say they have a chance in Nevada, that the so-called Harry Reid machine is not omnipotent …

SEAN: Hm.

JON: … that, that it can be beaten in a presidential race.

SEAN: And if and if Kamala wins the process of elimination, that dictates that the opposite will be true, that this will still be the Harry Reid State, the machine that Harry built.

JON: I think the narrative will be even in adverse economic times, even in times when the demographics seem to have shifted a bit right. The machine still knows how to get its voters to the polls, whether it's early, in-person voting, or mail ballots or on Election Day, just enough to keep the state for for every cycle since 2008 in Democratic hands.   
  
SEAN: Do you think that there is a lot of voters out there in Nevada who are still trying to figure this one out, who are still undecided, people who we know will show up to vote on the fifth, but are still waiting to hear more from these candidates? And if so, what do you think will push them in either direction?

JON: Who are these people who can be undecided in this race at this point, right?  
  
SEAN: <chuckles>  
  
JON: Most of the polling shows that there's about 5% or so undecided, some polls at 7 or 8%. And so I think every little bit could matter.

SCORING IN – #DoYourJobDoSomeResearch (minimal kick, polyrhythm, moving forward, figuring things out)-01

JON: Are these service workers, these blue collar workers who back in the day we're called Reagan Democrats, will they go for Trump? If they listen to the are you better off now than you were four years ago? Maybe they will vote for him.

SEAN: And these plans, no tax on tips. You know, more housing, freeing up federal land. Is that breaking through?

JON: I don't think … I mean, it's possible, as I said, if it's a very close race here, which it could be. It's very difficult to pinpoint what the tipping point was.

SEAN: Okay, John, really appreciate your time. And it sounds like you've got a lot to do with I'm sorry we didn't get to talk about your teenager, but please do give them our regards.

JON: She's a wonderful kid and keeps me busy.

SEAN: All right. All the best to her. Thanks so much for your time and all the best in the next few days.

JON: Thank you. I will need it.

SCORING BUMP  
  
SEAN: Jon Ralston. Editor and CEO of the Nevada Independent. THE Nevada Independent dot com. He’s also father to a newly-minted teenager.

When we’re back on *Today, Explained*, we’re gonna ask how these Harris and Trump economic proposals are landing in the rest of the country.

[BREAK]

[BUMPER]

SEAN: *Today, Explained.* Sean Rameswaram with Richard Rubin. He reports on tax policy at the *Wall Street Journal*. And lately that’s meant he’s spent a lot of time thinking about the Trump and Harris economic proposals.

RICHARD RUBIN (tax policy reporter at *Wall Street Journal*): Trump wants to raise tariffs on imports and cut income taxes significantly across the board. Harris wants to provide targeted tax cuts to households and expand some government spending and raise taxes on rich people.

They're, they’re very different candidates on the economy and on taxes and spending, but they have this common theme of saying vote for me and I’ll give you this policy this change this tax credit this deduction whatever, they have this common theme of offering something to people.

SEAN: It feels like at least, you know, for the past two ish months, these two have been trying to one up each other in terms of the giveaways, the tax rebates, the freebies. Has it felt that way to you, too?

RICHARD: Yeah. And the Trump ones in particular are very ad hoc.

SCORING IN – That Parachute Dream (irregular phrase lengths, minimal, heartbeat, slow attack synth, hand percussion, rototoms, ghostly, non-resolving)-04

RICHARD: So it'll be. Just a random speech at a rally, and he's in Detroit, so he's going to say we should let car loan interest be deductible …

*<CLIP> FORMER PRESIDENT TRUMP: so we’re gonna make it fully deductible the interest payments that’s going to revolutionize your industry.*

RICHARD: Or he's in Nevada. So we should he says we should…

*<CLIP> FORMER PRESIDENT TRUMP: not charge taxes on tips, people making tips.*

RICHARD: He's got these very targeted pitches, they're very bumper sticker-y. He they're very slogan-y, they they're very catchy and memorable. And and then she's come up with some as well. She took the tax on tips. She's talked about the $6,000 tax credit for parents of newborns.

*<CLIP> HARRIS: 6 thousand dollars in tax relief to families in the first year of a child’s life now think what that means….*

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NIuTOEsdMlU)*> HARRIS: Basically what we will do is to allow medicare to cover in-home healthcare*

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oEThJ8Gr42E&t=12s)*> HARRIS: first time home buyers a 25,000 down payment assistance*

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TAlEsoHtmGg)*> HARRIS: we will expand the tax deduction for startups to $50,000…*

SCORING OUT

RICHARD: They're very easy to understand policies and promises. And they they work well in that stump speech, bumper sticker slogan, 30 second ad environment.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.instagram.com/realdonaldtrump/reel/DAoBy6buyB2/?hl=en)*> TRUMP AD: No taxes on tips, overtime or social security.  
FORMER PRESIDENT TRUMP: I’m Donald J Trump and I approve this message*

RICHARD: There was a while where it felt like Trump every week had something new that he was coming out with.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=onocma4AAk4)*> NEWS ANCHOR: Former president Donald Trump has proposed tax breaks for home generator costs in hurricane affected states if he’s elected.*

RICHARD: They're not fully thought out proposals. So when he says we're not going to tax over time, there's not a white paper, there's not a a piece of legislation that says, well, it's only for workers who are eligible for overtime pay, and it's both income and payroll taxes are one or the other. Like, these are not fully specked out proposals. These are rough sketches of things.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PGx_xgDQXFo&list=RDNSPGx_xgDQXFo&start_radio=1)*> FORMER PRESIDENT TRUMP: They said, how did you come up with this thing on deductibility of interest on automobiles? I said it was just an idea I had, but I had a better idea …*

SEAN: And Harris, a little more planned out? She did put out like this 80 page economic agenda. Yeah.

RICHARD: Right. It's definitely more typical of the level of detail we see in a campaign. And she has the advantage in that respect of the fact that she comes from an administration that put out a giant budget. Right? So she can essentially pick and choose from that and add some other new things to it as she lays out her policies. And those things have all been at some level vetted and thought through and detailed, even if that's not ultimately what she proposes next year, if she wins or what gets enacted by Congress.

SEAN: And do you get the feeling that she's doing this to sort of compete with Trump or is she doing this because people want to know what she's all about or maybe both?

RICHARD: You always see this in campaigns. You see it in a class president campaign in eighth grade, right.

SEAN: Hahaaaaaaa! I think I promised once that I would try to get us like longer recess or something when I was running for student office.

RICHARD: Did it work? Did you get.

SEAN: I won!

RICHARD: And did you get longer resist?

SEAN: No, but I … I had good ideas. <laughs>

RICHARD: Right. So this is basically this is something like that, you know, tater tots for all that's that's where we are. We’ll call it universal basic tater tots, um …   
  
SEAN: <laughs>   
  
RICHARD: But there is some element of that where obviously there's more zeros here and there's and it's serious because Congress can actually do some of this. And if you go back the past few presidents Clinton, Bush, Obama, Trump, Biden all campaigned on a series of promises to voters…

SCORING IN – Ladybug (mellow, raymond scott, minimal synth, playing with melody attack rate, breakbeat)-02

RICHARD: I'm going to cut middle class taxes.

*<CLIP> FORMER PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH: people who pay the bills ought to get some money back it’s a difference of opinion, he wants to grow the government and I trust you with your own money*

RICHARD: I'm going to expand health insurance.

*<CLIP> FORMER PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA: make sure that insurance companies can’t discriminate on the basis of pre-existing conditions*

RICHARD: I'm going to provide stimulus checks.

*<CLIP> PRESIDENT BIDEN: Money that will go out the door immediately to help people who are in real trouble*

RICHARD: And a lot of them tried to do them and a lot of them delivered. So the stuff we're hearing now that's not fully fleshed out – 3 or 4 months from now when there's a new president and a new Congress – is very much live and very much real and some of it is likely to happen.

SCORING OUT

RICHARD: Big chunks of the tax cuts that Trump put into effect in 2017 are scheduled to expire at the end of next year. So that's the context for the proposals that candidates are coming out with, is that something is going to happen on the tax code next year.

SEAN: Well, in that case, I guess it's worth, you know, properly examining each one. How would you characterize each candidate's approach to two tax breaks or free money? Like, what are the core differences between Harris's, you know, targeted cuts and tax hikes on the rich and and more spending versus Trump's, you know, income tax cuts and and more tariffs on China?

RICHARD: Yeah. So I think one key difference is and pardon me for using tax nerd speak, but it's important is the difference between tax credits and tax deductions. Tax credits are subtractions from the amount of taxes you owe. Right, so it takes your total, a 5000 tax credit would take your tax bill from 7000 to 2000. A deduction is a subtraction of the amount of income. So a $5,000 deduction would take your taxable income from 7000 to 2000 and then you pay taxes on that 2000. Harris is much more in the credit side of things. Trump is much more in the deduction side of things. So Harris's proposals, particularly the child tax credit, are really beneficial for lower and middle income households, particularly where she talks about refundable tax credits.   
  
SEAN: Mm.   
  
RICHARD: Trump's proposals are very much in the nature of deductions and exemptions. So you wouldn't be taxed on overtime pay, you wouldn't be taxing Social Security benefits, you wouldn't be taxed on generator purchases or whatever he’s talked about. Those all lower your taxable income. And can get your tax bill down to zero but wouldn't make it negative.

SEAN: What about the deficit? Famously, not a popular thing to care about.

RICHARD: There's a nonpartisan estimate that, again, these are estimates that said that Trump's policies would increase deficits by $7.5 trillion over the next decade, and Harris's would do so by 3.5 trillion. And just to be clear, that's on top of the 22 trillion in additional deficits that would happen if Congress does nothing.

SEAN: For all the differences between the two candidates plans there, there are some key similarities. They both don't want to tax tips. They're both trying to do giveaways there. They're both going to increase the deficit. What do the differences, let's say, or the similarities tell us about their priorities once they win?

RICHARD: That's a good way of thinking about it. I think for Trump, the priorities are cut taxes, he … and do it bigly, so to speak.   
  
SEAN: Hm!  
  
RICHARD: For Harris. I think you'll see, you know, her priority is to try to pair up the policies as much as possible. So to pair a giveaway with higher taxes on rich people and corporations. We've seen her priorities be what they talk about is the care economy. So expanding Medicare to cover in-home care. The child credit expansion is helping parents care for newborns. Helping bridge costs that she's that she's talked about.

SEAN: Which one would Americans feel more – the, the credits of Harris or the deductions of Trump?

RICHARD: Well, because a lot of these proposals are so targeted, it really depends if you're the parent of a newborn, and right now, you're getting at most $2,000 from the child tax credit and Harris bumps that to 6000. Well, yeah, you're going to feel that $4,000 a lot if you're a middle of higher income tipped worker or someone to making overtime pay or Social Security recipient who would have to pay lower taxes than you would pay less under Trump. And you'd notice that more. And that means how you feel them depends on whether you fall into these targeted demographic group or not.

SEAN: Do we know which bucket is resonating more with voters outside Nevada, which we talked about in the first half of the show?

RICHARD: Yeah the tip thing is really popular. The Social Security benefit thing is very popular, taking away income tax and Social Security benefits, even if that increases the national debt. And that's a key piece that people are eager to get the benefits tax cuts and aren't really so concerned themselves about the other side of the ledger, people like to get things.

SEAN: Yeah.

RICHARD: I mean, right, like it's Halloween, right?

SCORING IN –

RICHARD: So people like to go, We have a whole holiday where you walk into people's houses and they give you stuff!   
  
SEAN: Hahaaaaa.  
  
RICHARD: Like, we love that. I think there's big differences between the candidates and depending on where you are as a person, it's pretty easy to figure out if you're voting on economic policy, if you're voting on economic issues where you go, people just have different taste buds, so to speak.   
  
 SCORING BUMP  
  
SEAN: Richard Rubin. W S J dot com. Peter Balonon-Rosen made our show today. Amina Al-Sadi edited. Laura Bullard facted. Patrick Boyd and Andrea Kristinsdottir mixed.

We’ve got one more of these battleground state shows for you. Michigan is coming the day before Election Day on *Today, Explained.*

[10 SECONDS OF SILENCE]