Wednesday, Nov 6, 2024 / Trump country

[HALF SECOND OF SILENCE]

[BILLBOARD]

SEAN RAMESWARAM (host): The very first thing Vox published this year was an article titled “24 things we think will happen in 2024.”

NOEL KING (host): And the first prediction in that article was that Donald Trump would win the presidency.

SCORING <Live at the Paymore – BMC>

SEAN: We asked Dylan Matthews, who wrote that prescient blurb, about his hunch this morning.

DYLAN MATTHEWS (Vox reporter): Biden was incredibly unpopular. People seemed really mad about inflation and that seemed to have sort of a lagging, enduring effect that was lasting into the election year.

NOEL: Now, a lot happened over the next eleven months. A lot more than even Dylan predicted. But in the end, he was right – at least about Trump.

DYLAN: The other thing I got wrong was that I, I underestimated how many Cybertrucks would sell. So one of my takeaways is that I, uh, I bet against Elon Musk and lost. And I’m gonna be thinking about that for a while.

SEAN: Guess there’s no accounting for taste!  
  
NOEL: There sure isn’t. How Trump won and what comes next on *Today, Explained*.

[THEME]

SEAN: *Today, Explained*. Sean Rameswaram here with Andrew Prokop, senior political correspondent at *Vox* dot com, who's here to tell us what happened last night and this morning. Andrew, what happened last night and this morning?

ANDREW PROKOP (*Vox* senior politics correspondent): Well, four years after Donald Trump tried to steal the 2020 presidential election and left office in disgrace, the American people chose to return him to power and gave him another term in office.

SEAN: And why did the American people choose that?

ANDREW: That is a debate that is going to be very heated over the coming days and weeks and months and years. But my viewpoint is that this election was not so much about either of the candidates on the ticket and more about President Joe Biden.

*<CLIP> PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN: C’mon, man!*

SCORING <Trying To Be Well - BMC>

ANDREW: Biden is, simply put, one of the most unpopular presidents in history, and he has been for some time. His approval rating, last I checked, was somewhere around 38%. And again, it's been there for some time. And you know, I think there was a hope among Democrats this year that Biden's bad approval was just because he was old or just because of his vibes, and that if they put in a younger, newer face, then they wouldn't have problems with the electorate, with the public, that they would win. In her defense, Kamala Harris came a lot closer to winning than we would expect, traditionally, given Joe Biden's horrible approval ratings as the incumbent. But she did not get all the way there. And my belief is that she simply had too high a hill to climb, given the voter anger at Biden and Democrats that she inherited.

SCORING OUT

ANDREW: So, when Kamala Harris unexpectedly became the Democratic presidential nominee in July, she immediately had to grapple with the question of how her campaign would handle the fact that she is Joe Biden's vice president and that voters really don't like Joe Biden. Some expected her to perhaps break with Biden and the Biden administration in some way, say that mistakes were made, make a pretty clear argument for how she would do things differently on policy. She chose not to do that, basically.

*<CLIP> VICE PRESIDENT KAMALA HARRIS: Joe Biden is an extremely accomplished, experienced, and, and, and capable in every way that anyone would want of their president <fade crosstalk under>*

ANDREW: And she chose to argue that, you know, when the economy came up, she argued that, ‘You know, the economy is doing great.’

*<CLIP> HARRIS: What we have done is clean up Donald Trump’s mess. What we have done – and what I intend to do – is build on what we know are the aspirations and hopes of the American people. But I’m going to tell y’all… <fade under>*

ANDREW: When immigration came up, and voter anger about the situation at the border, she would say, ‘Well, that's all Republicans’ fault for not passing the immigration reform bill.’

*<CLIP> HARRIS: But you know what happened to that bill? Donald Trump got on the phone, called up some folks in Congress, and said ‘kill the bill.’ And you know why? Because he’d prefer to run on a problem instead of fixing a problem.*

ANDREW: What she didn't say was, ‘I hear people are unhappy with certain things that the Biden administration did. I accept that. And I would do things differently in these specific ways.’ Now, there are understandable reasons why she might not have done that. I'm sure they considered doing this. I'm sure they tested it. Perhaps they ultimately thought that, you know, making any admission of flaws hurt more than it helped. And so I'm not second guessing the political calculation there, but I am pointing out that it did not work.

SEAN: There's a lot of people talking this morning about some serious demographic shifts, realignments. How much are you thinking about that?

ANDREW: I think it's too early to say. Almost all analysis purporting to know how different age groups or gender groups or racial or ethnic groups shifted is based on the exit polls, which past experience has shown are highly unreliable and unlikely to match what actually happened. The more rigorous and reliable analyses take more time. So in the absence of evidence, I kind of default to the idea of, you know, rather than like demographic number-crunching, what happened more is a broad national shift against Democrats that we can see among many different demographics and types of voters. That shift may have been more intense among certain demographics. But, but this is not something that only happened in a few places. This was pretty widespread.

SEAN: Okay, we’ve covered how Harris lost the race. Even how Biden lost the race. How did Trump win the race? Because it seemed like his campaign was rather messy.  
  
ANDREW: Well, I think the political conventional wisdom all throughout this race has been that Trump had a good hand given voters’ dissatisfaction with Joe Biden and his record, particularly on key issues like inflation, immigration and foreign policy. But I think one important thing that Trump did do is that he really tried to wriggle away from the abortion issue. He saw and understood that the Dobbs decision was a problem for Republicans in 2022. Basically at a time when Republican pro-life groups were feeling flush with victory and urging Republicans to go further, perhaps passing a national abortion ban, Trump did not want anything to do with that.

*<CLIP> FORMER PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP: My view is now that we have abortion where everybody wanted it from a legal standpoint, the states will determine by vote or by legislation or perhaps both, and whatever they decide must be the law of the land – or in this case, the law of the state.*

ANDREW: He was cautious about the abortion issue and wanted to sort of and wanted to make sure that it didn't sink his campaign, which in the end it didn't. And, you know, it may be selective memory to think back about the Trump years and how crazy they were and be like, well, there was this Trump nostalgia that sort of came up, that like, well, at least we didn't have inflation. Well, at least, you know, the border problem wasn't so bad or well, we didn't have these, like, horrible foreign wars in Ukraine and in Gaza. And of course, you can't really fairly blame Biden for all of that. But the idea that – and also a sort of retrospective forgetting of the pandemic – the idea that things were better in the 2017 to 2019 years of the Trump era, and that if he returned and that the pandemic wasn't really his fault and that if he returned to power, we could get back to those years, I think that was a powerful advantage that he had in this race. And in the end, you know, trying to steal the election and being indicted four times proved to matter much less than voter's dissatisfaction with the current state of the country and wanting things to be different.

SEAN: What happens to all that stuff, Andrew? I know you've reported on it.

ANDREW: Well, the federal cases against Trump are going to go away for sure. He's made that very clear. He'll put someone in at the Justice Department who will just close those down and drop those prosecutions. He's still set for sentencing in the New York state case where he was actually convicted. But <laughs> consider it unlikely that he will serve that sentence any time soon, given that he's going to be the president. And the Georgia case has been bogged down in procedural issues for some time. So, yes, the big effort to indict Trump four times and hold him accountable and disqualify him in voters’ eyes from holding office again has turned out to be a complete failure.

SCORING <Fish in a Cup - BMC>

SEAN: A lot of people are happy today, Andrew. A lot of people are despondent. A lot of people are just staring off into the distance, wondering what the next four years are going to look like. What kind of mandate does Donald Trump have to govern this country for the next four years?

ANDREW: I don't really believe in the concept of a mandate, but, like what he…

SEAN: Ooh!

ANDREW: He won the popular vote, so he can point to that. Republicans will have the Senate and the House is not clear yet. It’ll take some time to figure that out. But that will obviously play a big role in whether Trump can… has a free hand to pass his agenda. But yeah, he'll be able to confirm his appointees. He had his best presidential election performance of three runs. He can fairly claim that he won the argument, that the American people – more of the American people – were convinced that he would be a better president than Kamala Harris would. And now we will see what that will bring us.

SCORING BUMP

SEAN: Andrew Prokop. *Vox* dot com. A great place to read all about the next four years of Donald Trump, I guess.

NOEL: And coming up next, Sean. Coming up: what is Donald Trump gonna do?

[BREAK]

[BUMPER]

NOEL: It’s *Today, Explained*. I’m Noel King. Shelby Talcott covered the Trump campaign for *Semafor*. And Shelby, you were with President-elect Trump and his team in West Palm Beach last night. What was that like?

SHELBY TALCOTT (*Semafor* reporter): Yeah, the campaign last night went into this this sort of cautiously optimistic and actually, in fact, the data was so good for them and the polling was so good for them compared to prior elections that some of them were a little bit paranoid because they hadn't dealt with being in such a good position compared to 2020 and and 2016. So they were double-checking the data, but they were going in feeling pretty good. And as the night went on and the, and the data started rolling in, I was hearing from campaign aides who were with Donald Trump at Mar-a-Lago, and they quickly became, you know, much more confident because it seemed like all the numbers were going more for them than they were for Kamala Harris.

NOEL: When Trump spoke last night, what did you hear?

SHELBY: Donald Trump sort of I think in a way, he was almost surprised that it was such a decisive victory. And he took the stage with a number of campaign aides and with his family. And he spent some time thanking everybody. And he said that:

*<CLIP> TRUMP: Frankly, this was, I believe, the greatest political movement of all time. There's never been anything like this in this country and maybe beyond.*

SHELBY: And he talked a little bit about immigration, which is, you know, a key topic we've heard him talk about before. He went on sort of a long tangent about Elon Musk.

*<CLIP> TRUMP: You know, he set the rocket up two weeks ago, and I saw that rocket and I saw it coming down and I saw it, it was, when it left, it was beautiful, shiny, white when it came down.*

SHELBY: A few of us sort of looked around like, you know, at 2:00 in the morning.

*<CLIP> TRUMP: He said, we've never made a paint that could withstand that kind of heat.*

SHELBY: I think in some ways he maybe wasn't expecting to win by such wide margins.

NOEL: All right. We know that Donald Trump was elected for a couple of reasons. Americans are very unhappy about the economy, inflation, the cost of housing. Let's talk about what Trump has promised to do if elected and what we expect to see quickly. What do you think we're going to see on the economy after Trump takes office?

SHELBY: Well, one of the big things Trump has promised, of course, is to implement a bunch of tariffs.

SCORING <Catbus Catbus Where You Been>

*<CLIP> BLOOMBERG: Critics say your tariffs will be a national sales tax.   
TRUMP: Nope. No.   
BLOOMBERG: America has three trillion dollars worth of imports. You will add tariffs to every single one of them. That is going to push up the costs for those looking to buy foreign goods.   
TRUMP: No. It’s not–   
BLOOMBERG:That’s simple mathematics, President Trump.   
TRUMP: Yeah it is, but not the way you figure.*

SHELBY: And that, you know, has a number of potential implications. He argues that it will help because essentially it will threaten some of these other countries and they will, you know, do America's bidding. But when I talk to economists, they say, ‘You know, this could actually make costs rise in the short term.’ And so that, I think, is something that he's going to try to do right away. I think also, you know, he talked a little bit last night about the makeup of the House and Senate, and that's going to be really crucial in how much he's able to get done. You know, Trump wants to extend all of the, the tax cuts that he passed in 2017. So that's going to be really big. And I anticipate that that could be, you know, a big fight heading in to his office. He also wants to lower the corporate tax rate to 15% for some companies. He's promised a number of rollbacks on taxes, which is, you know, a big reason why some people voted for him. And so that's going to be interesting to see how he, how he can implement all of these tax breaks that he has promised the American people over the last few months. And so he has promised a wide swath of things that may be difficult to implement, but also will be interesting to see sort of how he implements and the repercussions should he actually be successful in implementing it.

SCORING OUT

NOEL: Donald Trump has also made big promises on immigration, and the way he's been framing them is kind of like, ‘These are day one promises.’ What should we expect on immigration right out of the gate?

SHELBY: You know, he has promised mass deportation.

*<CLIP> TRUMP: We will begin the largest deportation operation in the United States, Dwight Eisenhower right now has that record…*

SHELBY: And I've done a lot of reporting on this on sort of what that plan would look like. When I've talked to the Trump campaign, they say they're going to start with those people who have committed crimes. And then there's going to be such a big plan afterwards that it'll essentially make it so difficult for undocumented immigrants to live that that a lot of them will just self-deport. And I think there's a lot of challenges to that. When I've talked to experts and he'll have a lot of leeway to make political changes compared to the Biden administration. But there's going to be… he's going to face legal hurdles. He's going to face logistical hurdles. And his campaign is aware that this is not going to necessarily be something that they just implement with sort of no pushback.

NOEL: You joined us twice on the show to talk about Project 2025, Trump distanced himself from Project 2025 while campaigning very publicly. But now he's won. What are we expecting there?

SHELBY: You know, when I talked to Donald Trump's campaign, they sort of hold a grudge against Project 2025 and the people who developed it, which is the Heritage Foundation. And I've actually been told and and I think this reporting matches what others have been told is that there's sort of a ban on anyone who was affiliated in any way with Project 2025. Now, whether that holds because, you know, listen, Project 2025 and the Heritage Foundation, it was a huge project, right? It was, thousands of people were involved in some way or another. And so to sort of just mass ban all of those people might be very difficult when you're thinking about having to staff an entire upcoming White House. But there are some grudges because Project 2025, of course, became such a rallying cry for Democrats and it was successful to an extent.

NOEL: Yes, it was successful. It scared Democrats and it appeared for time that it was really motivating Democrats. What about Trump's plans to shrink the federal government?

SHELBY: Yeah, so Schedule F is obviously something that we've talked about a lot. I think that was one of the first big topics that was brought up when Donald Trump first ran. He wants to essentially strip civil service protections for a number of career federal workers in, in positions that normally would be protected from administration to administration. And he wants to sort of bring in a lot more loyalists in his White House. And this is something that he, he has talked about for years. This is not a new policy to this administration. President Biden actually rescinded Schedule F when he took office in 2021. So it would have a really big effect on government, he wants to just sort of rehaul everything. He wants to make a lot of things smaller. He also wants to, you know, he just talked about getting rid of certain, certain things I know the conservatives have talked a lot and this was in 2025 about getting rid of, you know, the Department of Education, for example, and sort of bringing it all back to the states. And so there are a lot of proposals that have been floating around for a long time regarding major rehauls to the federal government.

NOEL: What did your time – you covered the Trump campaign throughout this season – what did your time covering this campaign tell you about the next four years?

SHELBY: You know, I do think that Donald Trump's campaign this time around has been one of the more organized campaigns that he's run.

SCORING <Scanning the Horizon>

Now, is that saying that it was the most organized campaign or that you did not have the candidate going off of going off script and complicating things for his campaign aides? No, he, Donald Trump certainly did that. But I think the biggest thing is that he had more experienced people this time around who have been there, done that. And I think that that sort of is representative of how he could approach the next four years, is, when he got into office in 2016, he surrounded himself with a lot of people who weren't necessarily experienced in all of this. Now you have people potentially returning like Stephen Miller, who is big on the immigration stuff, who has been here for years. They know what the legal arguments are going to look like. They're ready to fight. They are more prepared to find ways to implement Donald Trump's plan that they weren't in his first term.

SCORING BUMP

NOEL: Shelby Talcott, *Semafor.*

SEAN: Today’s show was produced by Amanda Lewellyn and Miles Bryan with help from Avishay Artsy, Victoria Chamberlin and Eliza Dennis.

NOEL: It was edited by Amina Al-Sadi with an assist from Matt Collette. It was fact checked by Laura Bullard.

SEAN: It was mixed and mastered by Patrick Boyd and Rob Byers. And most important of all, Guglielmo King is our mascot. He sat with us all night.

NOEL: For Sean Rameswaram, I’m Noel King.

[10 SECONDS OF SILENCE]