**Friday, July 19, 2024 / Trump-a-mania at the RNC**

**[HALF SECOND OF SILENCE]**

**[BILLBOARD]**

Noel King, host *Today, Explained*: Following introductions from his son Eric, Hulk Hogan,

*<CLIP> C SPAN: Hulk Hogan, American professional wrestler: …LET TRUMPAMANIA RUN WILD BROTHER*

Noel King: and UFC President Dana White, Donald Trump took the stage in Milwaukee last night to accept the Republican nomination, and the country got a glimpse of a man changed by proximity to death

*<CLIP> C SPAN: Former President Donald Trump: It was a warm, beautiful day in the early evening in Butler Township in the great Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. <<applause>> I went to the stage and the crowd was cheering wildly. Everybody was happy.*

Noel King: : and then, 30 minutes in, that man changed right back.

*<CLIP>C SPAN: Trump: The late, great Hannibal Lecter. He’d love to have you for dinner.*

Noel King: : On Today, Explained: Donald Trump’s unity speech and his disunity speech.

**[THEME]**

Noel King: I’m Noel King. On Today, Explained: we’re talking to TWO conservatives - both of them used to be staunch Republicans. Today, one is not.

As you’ll hear, Donald Trump is the reason.

Scott Jennings is a political contributor to CNN and a partner at Run Switch Public Relations in Louisville <LURR-vull> Kentucky.

Noel: Sarah Longwell is publisher of The Bulwark and heads Republican Voters Against Trump. Sarah does a lot of Republican POLLING and of course, she watched Thursday night

Sarah Longwell, Executive Director, *Republican Voters Against Trump* and publisher, *The Bulwark* and host, *The Focus Group Podcast*: What stood out to me is how much Donald Trump couldn't help himself from taking what could have been, halfway decent speech for him, and turned it into one of his weird, disjointed rallies that, in addition to being very strange, he was trying to to keep himself at an even keel, which made him look sort of bizarrely low energy as he was giving it.

*<CLIP> C SPAN: Trump: As Americans, we are bound together by a single fate and a shared destiny. We rise together or we fall apart.*

Sarah Longwell: He started out acting like he was going to give a speech about unifying people, about, talking about how the divisions are hurting us. And then he went into, just an absolutely insane, surreal session of grievance and name calling,

*<CLIP> TRUMP:  Crazy Nancy Pelosi, the whole thing, just boom, boom, boom*

Sarah Longwell: and, was just the person that he's always been.

*<CLIP> C SPAN: Trump: And the leader of the United Auto Workers should be fired immediately and every single auto worker union and non union should be voting for Donald Trump*

Noel King: Sarah, you were not sold. Scott. What did you think?

Scott Jennings, CNN senior political contributor and Run Switch Public Relations partner: Well, like most Republicans who, are operating on Friday morning on nothing more than adrenaline and Hulkamania. I thought the whole convention was actually pretty well done. Now, as it relates to Donald Trump's speech, it was a long speech. No disputing that. And he did use his prepared remarks, and he also used his unprepared remarks. So it it did go on for, for quite some time. But the part that mattered the most, to me, was the first section where he was recalling, nearly being assassinated in Pennsylvania.

*<CLIP> TRUMP: I will tell you exactly what happened and you'll never hear it from me a second time because it's actually too painful to tell.*

Scott Jennings: It was riveting. And if you were in the arena, you could have heard a pin drop in there.

*<CLIP> TRUMP: and moved my right hand to my ear, brought it down. My hand was covered with blood, just absolutely blood all over the place. I immediately knew it was very serious that we were under attack, and in one movement proceeded to drop to the ground.*

Scott Jennings: So I think that was extremely well done. And one of the most memorable things was when, Trump went over to the firefighters helmet and jacket and he kissed the helmet.

*<CLIP> TRUMP: He lost his life selflessly acting as a human shield to protect them from flying bullets. He went right over the top of them and was hit. What a fine man he was.*

Noel King: Scott, you spoke to Trump's advisers. What was he trying to do in those ten or so minutes?

Scott Jennings: Well, he was trying, I think, to to do something that literally no one else, no other politician can do right now. And that's talk about this, you know, a surreal moment of being at a rally, at a political event and nearly being killed. I mean, he still has the bandage on his ear. And I think what the campaign was hoping to portray, was a Donald Trump that, had an experience that, you know, all of us hope we never have, which is effectively a near-death experience and how that impacted his thinking.

*<CLIP> TRUMP: Bullets were flying over us, yet I felt serene.*

Sarah Longwell: You know, it's it's interesting. I think that first 30 minutes was a bit of a Rorschach test for, how people feel about Donald Trump, because I watched Donald Trump do the the sort of kissing the helmets and there is just a way that he does things where it always sounds, sort of inauthentic and staged. Donald Trump made it just sort of about him. Right? Like he could have made it about the country, about political violence. The problem is, is Donald Trump doesn't have any moral authority to talk about political violence. He's a person who foments political violence.

*<CLIP> TRUMP: knock the crap out him would you seriously CHEERS I'd like to punch him in the face I’ll tell ya*

Sarah Longwell: He's a person who has created an environment of political violence with rhetoric, that has been incendiary from day one.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.c-span.org/video/?534136-1/president-trump-campaigns-rome-georgia#)*> TRUMP: I WILL END THE AGONY OF OUR PEOPLE, THE PLUNDER OF OUR CITIES, THE SACKING OF OUR TOWNS, THE VIOLATION OF OUR CITIZENS, AND THE CONQUEST OF OUR COUNTRY. THEY’RE CONQUERING OUR COUNTRY.*

Sarah Longwell: There's sort of a way in which you see some Republicans who want to try to polish Trump up for people. They, they say like, oh, he's going to be changed. She's going to have a new tone. He's going to be a person of unity. But when I was talking to swing voters just very recently about the assassination attempt and asked people if they thought it would change Trump, the voters are much more clear-eyed than the pundits and the analysts because they were like, absolutely not.

Noel King: You've both identified that there was a big shift last night, after about 30 minutes from an attempt at reflectiveness thoughtfulness back to, you know, the Donald Trump who who is not entirely well, who is sometimes incoherent, loves to kind of puff himself up. Trump only referred directly to President Biden once last night. He made a point that he was only going to refer to him once.

*<CLIP> TRUMP: if you took the ten worst presidents in the history of the United States, think of it, the ten worst, added them up, they will not have done the damage that Biden has done. Only gonna use the term once. Biden.*

NOEL KING: Scott - the campaign seemed to indicate that Donald Trump wrote one speech, tore it up after the assassination attempt, then wrote another one. What do you think was going on last night with that wild with that dramatic shift in tone?

Scott Jennings: Well, if I may go back to something, Sarah said, just briefly, I'm quite surprised to hear her say that the guy who got his ear shot off and nearly died doesn't have any moral authority to talk about what it's like to go through a, a moment of extreme political violence, but we'll leave that there. Here's what I think. I think that, if you look at the prepared text that was distributed, then you could see and follow along and feel the moments where he was adding in, you know, the Trump ad libs, the Trump asides and the, you know, sort of the Trump observations that were not part of the prepared text. So he really did give two speeches, but he was sort of giving them at the same time.

Sarah Longwell: He didnt give two speeches last night. He gave one speech that was on a teleprompter that people were that was meant to try to. Hey, no, no, no, don't don't go do the thing that you do. And then he did the thing that he does. Right, which is to call people names, incite people, and continue to drag us down as a country. And so, I don't for one second. I don't for one second shy away from being clear about who Donald Trump is and how he has brought us to this moment. Last night, what we saw after, I think, a couple weeks of Democrats feeling like this was going to be a rout and that Donald Trump was headed to a landslide election. I don't think people feel that way anymore

Noel King: What what should Donald Trump's goal have been with this speech last night? And do you think he achieved what he set out to achieve?

Scott Jennings: I think his goal, honestly, was, to put a capper on a convention that had a couple of missions. Number one, obviously, they spent the entire week trying to appeal to people who are non-traditional political audiences. That was sort of the purpose of the programing. Hulk Hogan on Thursday night was extremely unlike anything I've ever seen at a political convention.

*<CLIP> Hulk Hogan: You know something… I’ve seen some great tag teams in my time. Hulk Hogan and OO YEAH the macho man Randy Savage. But you know something.. I see the greatest tag team of my life standing upon us getting ready to straighten this country out for all the real Americans.*

Scott Jennings: You know, you had a dog in a wagon at one point.

*<CLIP> SUNDAY TIMES:*

*West Virginia Governor Jim Justice: Baby dog’s got a prediction here and the prediction is…Baby dog says… we’re going to retain the House, the majority in the House…*

Scott Jennings: We had an Instagram influencer, named Amber Rose.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LqSMVzoonsA)*> Amber Rose: These are my people, this is where I belong.*

Scott Jennings: I mean, these are not people who were there to talk to frequent, you know, Republican voters. They are there to expand and alter the composition of the electorate. The other thing they were trying to do, I think was just show that there are two major American political parties. One of them is functioning properly and the other one is a complete mess.

Sarah Longwell:. First of all, I agree with just about everything Scott said. I think that it was very clear that they wanted to appeal to a nontraditional audience. Kid Rock,

*<CLIP> Trump: Thank you Kid Rock, sometimes referred to as Bob…*

Sarah Longwell: Hulk Hogan, that person I had never heard of who's like an influencer who does naked walks, like, they just had a lot of, you know, very strange, programming and and I think it, you know, it depends on if you want a Republican Party, that is sort of steeped in, super online, you know, influencer culture or whether you want somebody who's going to talk about improving people's lives, bringing the country together. And I always think it's notable who wasn't there. Hulk Hogan was there, but George W Bush was not. Mitt Romney was not. Liz Cheney was not, Paul Ryan… So people who are in not so distant memory, leaders of a Republican Party that no longer exists, like they're not there, but this Amber Rose person is, um, and so I think that it it really spoke to how different the party is, how much it's changed. Um And what, uh is valued now in the Republican Party. I mean, the only thing it was about was Trump.

Scott Jennings: If I may, if I may respond to that for just a moment, I disagree that the entire convention was about fawning over Trump.

Sarah Longwell: Noel, if you took, if you took Scott Jennings from ten years ago just to younger, he's still he's handsome today, but let's just say he's ten years younger. And you showed him Donald Trump's speech from last night. Scott Jennings, Republican, just like me ten years ago, would look at that and go, who is that lunatic and what is he talking about? He would. There is no world in which Scott Jennings, without having gone on this journey in which he learns to accommodate the insanity that is this Republican Party would watch that speech cold and think, not think like aliens have taken over the Republican Party. And, this is lunacy.

Scott Jennings: I agree with Sarah that if you had taken us all back in time ten years ago and said, here's some video from the future, respond to it, we would all probably say, oh gosh, this is this must be some sort of prank, right? But that all changed when Donald Trump, came onto the scene and completely and totally changed our politics and changed the way we consume the politics and changed the way the Republican Party operates. And would I have been able to predict that in the year 2014. Doubtful. If I if I were that good of a prognosticator, I'd be rich. And neither one of you will be able to find me right now.

SCORING IN

Noel King: Scott Jennings and Sarah Longwell coming up, we're going to talk about what voters want from Donald Trump.

**[BREAK]**

**[BUMPER]**

*<CLIP> MADMEN: Pete Campbell: The president is a product. Don’t forget that.*

NOEL: Today, Explained is back! With Scott Jennings, political contributor to CNN, partner at RunSwitch Public Relations in Louisville Kentucky. Republican. Sarah Longwell, publisher of the Bulwark and head of Republican Voters Against Trump.

**NOEL:** Donald Trump's speech included the three main themes of the convention populist economy, strong national security. Isolationist foreign policy. So did Donald Trump last night paint a clear picture of how he would run the country if he's elected to a second term.

**SARAH:** Sort of. I mean, I think that. It was clear that he would continue to be the chaos agent that he has been. And most specifically, I think he's clear when it comes to policy, just on a couple of places. One is on foreign policy. The Republican Party now, is a much more isolationist party. When I do focus groups with Republicans, two time Trump voters, one of the things that you hear a lot about is how people do not want America to be involved in any of these foreign conflicts, including funding them in any way. And so there's also, obviously, immigration, is one of the issues where I think the Democrats are the most vulnerable. And I think that Donald Trump has really built his political, his entire political persona on sort of the build the wall, anti-immigration platform. And I think he's been successful with that, because that was one of the things that I think had been under the surface that nobody had really put their finger on until Donald Trump came along, is how frustrated Americans are with the lack of immigration policy that we have in this country. One of the things that's been interesting to me is how little Donald Trump and his team seem to be interested in winning back, sort of those college educated suburban swing voters that cost them the election, in 2020 And instead they're trying to expand the electorate with new people. And I think that, they are trying to build a, multiracial, working class party.

*<CLIP> Kensington Beach founder Michael Coyle: “Do you know what rotting flesh smells like? The people of my city do. In Donald Trump I see a leader who will end the urban nightmare. “*

SARAH: It is just not the party of Mitt Romney like it is a different party. It is a with a different set of values. And I think that that was very much on display.

**SCOTT:** I think Sarah's right. They're not necessarily trying to, overcompensate for winning back those suburban voters that went away from the Republican Party in 2022 or 2020. Even as you have some of those people flowing out of the Republican Party, the algebra is this who's flowing in, and you have all these working class voters, non-college of all races flowing into the party, Hispanics, African American men, and these sort of disconnected working class white voters, maybe people who've never even voted or registered to vote before. And that's the bet, right, is that you can replace these college educated, suburban, traditional Republican types of float out and replace them with this working class group. That's the point of this election. And we're going to find out whether he's right on election night.

**NOEL:** All right. So in part, Trump wants to draw new voters. Sarah, a couple of weeks ago, you talked to a group of Hispanic voters who previously voted for Hillary Clinton and Joe Biden. They were Democrats. Now they're leaning toward Trump. What did they tell you about why that is?

**SARAH:** Immigration was a big part of it. The economy was a big part of it. The Hispanic voters and the black voters that are sort of leaning Trump now who'd sort of traditionally been Democrats. They sound exactly like white Trump voters, like everybody sound everybody who sort of like Trump sounds basically the same about why. And it tends to be, issues around the economy, and feeling like, you know, they can't afford a house, can't afford an apartment. Groceries are very expensive. And so there's a there's this sort of economic piece, and they just happen to they sort of trust Trump more on the economy. When we talk to Hispanic voters, it is pretty consistent that Hispanic voters are very concerned about immigration policy. And, I think sometimes people think that it would be the opposite, that they'll say I came here the right way. The people I know came the right way.

**NOEL:** And so Trump's tough words on immigration and on immigrants last night. That was one of those moments where people said, hey, this is not unifying. This is this is standard Donald Trump. Sounds like standard Donald Trump on immigration is what a lot of American voters seem to want.

**SCOTT:** Well, I would just somewhat disagree with your characterization that it's not unifying because I agree with…

**NOEL:** Hannibal Lecter? Come on. Insane asylums?

*<CLIP> DONALD TRUMP: “they’re emptying out their insane asylums and terrorists are coming in at numbers we have never seen before…”*

**SCOTT:** He talked, Donald Trump talks about, fictional cannibals Joe Biden talks about the real ones that ate his uncle.

*<CLIP> JOE BIDEN: “They never found the body because there are a lot of cannibals for real in that part of New Guinea…*

SCOTT: So I guess we we have cannibals in both parties now. But, on the on the immigration issue, I actually think what he's saying. I agree with Sarah. Immigration is his brand. I mean, that's what got him into into politics in the first place, back in 2015. And now, if you look at his policy preferences, a majority of the American people prefer what he is selling as an as a prescription to the crisis. We have, including a majority of Hispanic Americans, say they support what Trump wants to do on immigration. So when you talk about something being divisive or, you know, not unifying, well, how are you defining that? Right now in this race, Trump's positions are preferred by a majority of the American people. That's what I would call unifying. And I would also say that Joe Biden's job approval on immigration is so bad that that's also unifying. People universally basically agree he's done a terrible job on it.

**NOEL:** All right. The other big line from Donald Trump last night, I was actually drifting off because the speech was very long. I felt my eyes closing. And then all of a sudden he said, no taxes on tips. And the crowd went wild.

*<CLIP> C SPAN:*

*Donald Trump: NO TAX ON TIPS. NO TAX ON TIPS <<applause>> <<chanting NO TAX ON TIPS>>*

**NOEL:** All right. So no taxes on tips is a message aimed at people who work for tips. There are about 4 million Americans in that position. What did we hear from Trump on the economy, an area where we know Americans have real problems with how Joe Biden has handled things?

**SCOTT:** If you heard Trump in his speech last night, he said, you know, all these people have all these ideas, I got this idea from a waitress

*<CLIP>C SPAN:*

*Donald Trump: I said to her, let me just ask you a question. ‘Would you be happy if you had no tax on tips?’ She said, what a great idea. I got my information from a very smart waitress. That's better than spending millions of dollars.*

**SCOTT:** The crowd did go wild for that last night, so it's like it's it's it's sort of a brilliant idea because it's a way for him to appeal to the low tax conservatives. Maybe some of them live in the suburbs, that Republicans have always been. And it's a way to appeal to this working class cohort. This several million people who work for tips at the same time. So I think he's actually hit up on a pretty, pretty smart idea there.   
  
**SARAH:** Donald Trump is telling a story. He's speaking this this actual it's a it's a policy thing that would affect a great number of people. But it's not like a big national policy that you'd hang your hat on. But it's a good story. And in it, it encapsulates a vision or an orientation around. The economy in general, even though it's just one very specific piece that even lots of people might not have context for. But because it's a good story, because it's easy to understand, right? Donald Trump tells a story, and people like can impute a broader economic message from that one story in a way that some kind of long laundry list of like, and we did this and we did this and we did this, and we want to do this is never going to land with people. And so I feel like Democrats have got to figure out, how to be a little bit more like Republicans on the communication side and being clear, because that's that is a place where they are just getting, they have there are lots of good stories that they could tell, on economics, and instead, they just try to throw the kitchen sink at it and people don't remember anything.

**NOEL:** All right. As we close out, we are about four months until the election. What does last night's speech tell each of you about what we should expect from the Trump campaign over the next four months? Sarah, let me start with you. And then, Scott, you’ll close us out.

**SARAH:** Well, look, I hope that we see a lot more of Donald Trump. Because one of the things that has really helped Donald Trump, but it's always been like this. I do focus groups and have, every week for the last 4 or 5 years. And also in the polling, one of the things you see is that when Donald Trump is less visible to people, his poll numbers go up when he is more visible to people. His poll numbers go down. I got to say, the point of the the unity piece of this, though, that was potent, like the fact that they've kicked everybody out, who was who was anti-Trump, the fact that, like, you cannot be that person in the party, means that they are now down to the party faithful, where Trump is like a messianic figure. And so Democrats need to realize what they're up against, and they need to get it together fast, and they need to find a candidate who can prosecute the case against Trump effectively, because Trump has more baggage than someone going to Europe for a year.

**SCOTT:** Well, I love the at the end of Sarah's speech, she said, and the Democrats need to find a candidate here on July the 19th, 2024 and with a month to go before the Democratic convention. And therein lies part of the message of the Republican National Convention. This is a functioning political party that's interested in having a big conversation with a wide variety of people about a lot of issues. And the convener, Donald Trump, said, you know, not everybody you see here may agree on everything this week, but you can all agree that it's good if we talk to each other and try to welcome more people in instead of kick people out. And the Republican Party said, hey, we're the party of fun. And Donald Trump was ahead when it started. And he's ahead by a little bit more now that it's over.

NOEL: Scott Jennings, CNN, Run Switch PR and Sarah Longwell, The Bulwark, Republican Voters Against Trump!

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This episode was produced by Peter Balonon-Rosen and Miles Bryan with help from Victoria Chamberlin, edited by Miranda Kennedy, fact checked by Matt Collette, and engineered by Andrea Kristinsdottir and Patrick Boyd.

The rest of our team includes Avishay Artsy, Hady Mawajdeh, Amanda Lewellyn, Miles Bryan, Denise Guerra [roll the R if you can], Rob Byers, and my co-host with the co-most Sean Rameswaram.

Our supervising editors are Amina Al-Sadi and Matt Collette. Our Executive Producer is Miranda Kennedy.

We use music by Breakmaster Cylinder.

I’m Noel King.

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**[10 SECONDS OF SILENCE]**