Tuesday, Aug. 6, 2024 / It’s Tim Walz

[HALF SECOND OF SILENCE]

[BILLBOARD]

SCORING <Hail to the Chief>

SEAN RAMESWARAM (host): Noel, if you and I were running for president, who would be at the top of the ticket, you think?  
  
NOEL KING (host): Wouldn’t we both be at the top of the ticket?  
  
SEAN: <chortles> No! Someone’s gotta be second banana.   
  
NOEL: Oh, Veep! Someone’s gotta be Veep. Okay. Are you old enough to be president?

SEAN: <laughs>

SCORING SPUTTERS OUT  
  
SEAN: Thank you for that. I … I have so many grays, Noel.

NOEL: More than me.  
  
SEAN: It’s presidential!  
  
NOEL: I dye mine.

SEAN: <laughs>

SCORING BACK IN

SEAN: Okay, well you’re my pick for president. But the point of the matter is Kamala made *her* pick today for Veep. Walz? Walz. Walz!  
  
NOEL: Minnesota governor, Tim Walz.

*<CLIP> Tim Walz!*   
  
SEAN: And you’re going to Minnesoeta to talk to the Minnesoetans.

NOEL: And you’re going to the office to talk to Andrew Prokop.  
  
SEAN: Let’s do it! *Today, Explained*!

SCORING OUT

SEAN: Love it. Great. That was good. That was, like, a minute.

NOEL: Perfect. Send it on in!

[THEME]

NOEL: It's *Today, Explained*. I'm Noel King with Dana Ferguson. Dana is a senior political reporter at Minnesota Public Radio MPR. Dana, tell us about Governor Tim Walz. Tell us everything we know about him.

DANA FERGUSON (senior political reporter, Minnesota Public Radio): He comes from a background of being a geography teacher. He grew up in rural Nebraska, and he talks about that quite a bit.

<[CLIP](https://www.c-span.org/video/?522195-1/minnesota-gubernatorial-debate)> CSPAN: *TIM* *WALZ (Minnesota governor): So putting money into teaching our young people, it’s where my family came from. My dad’s parents were butchers. They were immigrants and they owned a butcher shop in Tekamah, Nebraska. …*

DANA: He worked there for a while, met his wife, Gwen Whipple. They got married and ended up coming back to Minnesota. That's where she is from. And taught in southern Minnesota in a city called Mankato.

Walz hearkens back to a story about how he was at a political rally for then President George W Bush. He was with a group of students who had John Kerry, apparel on, and they were asked to leave the rally, and he was deeply concerned about that. He thought that the students had a right to be there and to be part of the political process. That inspired him to run for Congress in southern Minnesota. He was able to win in a deep red district, and served there for more than ten years before deciding to run for governor.

NOEL: And what's his reputation in Minnesota? Who? Who likes him? Who are his enemies?

DANA: So he's had to go through some pretty difficult circumstances as a governor. In his first term, he worked in a divided government. At that time, the Senate was Republican controlled. The House was Democratic controlled. So he had to figure out compromise. He had to pass a budget that both Republicans and Democrats could agree to. That was a little bit difficult. But Republican leaders at the Capitol said they had a generally good working relationship with him during that time. But that changed during Covid.

SCORING <Lordy I Hope There Are Drums (neutral, pushing forward, concert percussion) 59.wav>

<[CLIP](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZNb5w0RrGxc)> NBC: *WALZ: the process of how we as a state and we as a nation respond to these things is really important*

DANA: There was a lot of disagreement, mostly on a partisan level, about how the state should aim to curb the spread of Covid. Republican leaders felt that he took too firm a stance and didn't let people make their own decisions. On the Republican side, he has not made a lot of friends. But I would say progressive folks here are big fans of the governor's. He was instrumental in passing, many significant policy, uh, wins for them that they'd been working on for a long time in 2023. That includes free school meals. Protections for abortion access and gender affirming care in Minnesota. Paid family and medical leave, legalizing marijuana. So they point back to the policy gains that they made last year and just say the country could be ready for a number of those on a federal scale.

<[CLIP](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9kgzw54G7qI)> *WALZ: For 4 years. Despite enormous headwinds and complicated politics, we did get a lot of good things done for the people of Minnesota. But now we have a new mandate for action. A chance to set aside the old fights in favor of doing something truly historic for our children and our grandchildren. This is a moment we’ve been building towards for a long time.*

SCORING OUT

Noel King: Many people in the United States have not heard a ton about Tim Walz, but if we have heard about him, we've heard about him on guns. He's had a real evolution in his thinking on guns and on gun control, and it is certainly something that Republicans will bring up with him. Now on the ticket. Can you walk us through how he's evolved here?

DANA: Yeah. He was previously very strong on wanting folks to be able to have access to firearms. He was endorsed by the NRA. But since his time serving in Congress and really following the Parkland shooting, he has changed his tune.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9kgzw54G7qI)*> WALZ: I'm a veteran and I'm a hunter. And for many years as one of the best shots in Congress and I got the dang trophies to prove it. I know guns as well as anyone, but I'm sick and tired of talking about that because I'm not just a veteran, not just the hunter, not just a gun owner, I'm a father. And for many years I was a teacher and we all know damn well. Weapons of war have no place in our schools, in our churches, in our banks or anywhere someone wants to live in peace CHEERS*

DANA: And he's really come out strongly in support of more restrictions on firearms. The Democratic led legislature and the governor were able to put in additional restrictions red flag laws, stronger background checks for firearms, tougher penalties this year for folks who buy a gun and give it to someone who's not legally allowed to have one. So he really has changed.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9kgzw54G7qI)*> WALZ: When I first started in Congress, I has an A rating from the NRA.I have straight F's now. I sleep just fine at night. CHEERS AND LAUGHS*

He thinks that folks who own guns want to be safer about it. They are already locking up their firearms when they're not in use, and trying to make sure they don't fall in the hands of folks who aren't meant to have them.

NOEL: Hm. So in recent weeks, the governor has been credited with coming up with the weird line of attack, the idea that Donald Trump, JD Vance, and their like, are just strange people.

*<CLIP> WALZ: These guys are just weird that’s who they are*

*<CLIP> WALZ: That is weird behavior and I don’t think you call it anything else*

*<CLIP> WALZ: It’s weird. I don’t want JD Vance talking about my family. I certainly don’t want him talking about my daughter or my wife*

NOEL: I wonder what that tells us about him. So you could say, well, maybe he's a brilliant strategist, or you could say, well, maybe he's just a normal shoot from the hip midwesterner. What is your impression of, of Walz on this front, on the national front?

DANA: I think it comes more from his background as a teacher.

NOEL: Ha!

DANA: He does have a way of being just direct, concise. He likes to use these one liners to make a point and kind of dig in on political adversaries. During Covid, he would give these updates and sort of lay out the strategy of what the state was going to do to address the problem. And it was in a similar sort of teacher moment of just, here's what we're dealing with, here's what you need to know, and here's what we're going to do about it. So to me, it wasn't that surprising that he could find a term like weird, and brand it this way, but. Apparently the country really took hold of it.

<[CLIP](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xlDlP5e5-Mk)> PBS: *KAMALA HARRIS (vice president): And by the way, don’t you find some of their stuff to be just plain weird?*

NOEL: The country took hold of it, and it offered the Democrats a very compelling line of attack. What else do you think he brings to the Harris ticket?

DANA: I think that he'll be able to really communicate and connect with rural voters in a way that the vice president might not be able to. He talks quite a bit about having grown up in rural Nebraska and just small town issues that she might not be quite as connected to. I think folks appreciate the fact that he has a background of a veteran serving in the National Guard. He is experienced having served in Congress as well as as a governor. So I think folks appreciate his diverse experiences coming into, this position.

NOEL: You spent quite a bit of time in the past few weeks digging into Governor Walz. Are there any possible weaknesses for the campaign?

DANA: Yeah.

SCORING <Vector Mode (synth, minimal drums, drum glitches, modal, slow strings)>

DANA: I think that folks, especially on Trump's side, will point to the governor's response to the riots stemming from George Floyd's murder there are some that feel the governor didn't act quickly enough to call out the National Guard and the State Patrol to curb some of that, that he perhaps froze under pressure.They might point to to a Covid 19 era program that was a federal program, but, administered through the state here that was subject to widespread fraud. That's called feeding our future. It was meant to help kids get meals during the pandemic. But, a number of folks dipped into that money and misused it. They might also point to an arrest that he had, decades ago in Nebraska, for speeding. And he seemed to be driving under the influence. We've already seen that mugshot crop back up, so I would expect that he will speak about that.

SCORING OUT

NOEL: The Democrats seem to have realized that a lot of Americans are tired of dire existential negative politicking and are looking for a little bit of levity. It's the reason that Kamala Harris is laugh has not proved to be, a problem for her, but instead something that people, the people enjoy. You know, the governor, what do you expect to see from him in the next 100 days or so, as he gets on the road and starts to campaign?

DANA: I would expect to see him really getting out, talking to people. That's where he is the most charged up. He, as a former teacher and as a dad, he loves being around kids so I could see appearances where they might be in a classroom or talking to families. And he uses a lot of dad jokes, so don't be surprised when that comes around. And if he feels like he's got a good one, you're going to hear it more than once.

NOEL: What's his best dad joke?

DANA: Oh, wow. I might have to think about that and get back to you. There have been a lot of them over the years.

SCORING <Birds Dress Me In The Morning>

NOEL: Dana Ferguson, senior political reporter, Minnesota Public Radio. Sean, is that you?

SEAN: It’s me! I’m here! We’re going to Vox next.

NOEL: Comin’ up. *Today, Explained.*

[BREAK]

*<CLIP> OASIS, “WONDERWALL”: And after alllll… You’re my wonderrrrrw–*

SEAN: Walz… is the pick. *Today, Explained* is the program. Andrew Prokop is now the guest. Andrew, as we've heard the former presidents say, the VP pick doesn't really matter. But you'd never know that from like the last, I don't know, two weeks of intense speculation. Does this VP pick matter?

ANDREW PROKOP (senior politics correspondent, Vox): The extent to which the VP pick matters for determining who will win this upcoming election is generally a little overstated. Now, of course, the VP pick matters a great deal in determining the future of the party. Doesn't guarantee anything, but obviously Barack Obama's VP was Joe Biden, whose VP was Kamala Harris, and whose VP [pick] is now Tim Walz. So, you know, judging by past precedent, he has a pretty good shot at potentially running for the big job one day. But for now, he is second banana.

SEAN: <laughs> So tell us how Tim Walz became Barack Obama's VP's VP's VP.

ANDREW: Well, Harris started her search, and it seemed to focus mostly on white male politicians who are from the Midwest or other, potentially important electoral regions. So there was a six-person shortlist at one point, which was Walz, Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro, Arizona Senator Mark Kelly, Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear, Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg and Illinois Governor JB Pritzker.

SEAN: So many different kinds of white men. How did she choose the one?

ANDREW: It's real diversity!   
  
SEAN: <chortles>  
  
ANDREW: So she basically watered down that list to a final showdown between Walz and Josh Shapiro.

SCORING <Bone Cracks>

ANDREW: Throughout this process, it has seemed to most observers, myself included, that Josh Shapiro was the more likely pick, simply because Pennsylvania is the single most important state on the electoral map. Pennsylvania has 19 electoral votes. And when you run the different scenarios of how the election could go, it is very hard for Harris to win without Pennsylvania. So, you know, by crude electoral calculation, Shapiro would seem to be really the obvious pick: He is a popular incumbent governor. He's been viewed as a political rising star. So what happened? The first thing that happened is that was kind of unexpectedly went viral. He went viral with his, comments on MSNBC, calling Republicans weird.

ANDREW: It was an interesting tonal shift from the Democrats’ typical portrayal as Donald Trump, as a terrifying threat to democracy. It had a bit more of light mockery to it. But as governor of Minnesota, he eventually won a trifecta – Democrats in control of the whole state – and passed, a sweeping progressive agenda. But there are a lot of other governors who did similar things, and it makes it a little, and so it's a little unclear why the left became so, hot on was in particular. Unless you understand the greater context around Shapiro –

SCORING HARD OUT

SEAN: You're saying Walz didn’t just fall out of a coconut tree.

ANDREW: Well yes. Yes, yes. He exists in the context of all which came before him, which is the fact that there was increasing resistance, opposition and controversy within parts of the party, around the idea of picking Josh Shapiro. This is for a few reasons. One is the particularly divisive issue in democratic politics of Israel-Gaza. Shapiro has a long record of being pretty solidly supportive of Israel. He has evolved with other Democrats on this issue. He says nowadays, he says Benjamin Netanyahu is a terrible prime minister who should step down. But, you know, he was pretty tough on campus protesters. He has a long history and track record of saying things that are pretty strongly supportive of, of Israel in, at times in opposition to Palestinians.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://archive.org/details/FOXNEWSW_20240804_130000_FOX_and_Friends_Sunday/start/305/end/365?q=shapiro+college)*> FOX AND FRIENDS: In 1993, Shapiro, then a 20-year-old student at the University of Rochester, wrote [that] Palestinians and Israel could not peacefully coexist. Shapiro, who is Jewish, wrote in part, Palestinians, quote, do not have the capability to establish their own homeland and make it successful even with the aid of Israel and the United States. They are too battle-minded to be able to establish a peaceful homeland of their own, unquote.*

ANDREW: And so, you know, fairly or unfairly, it's not really clear how much his selection would mean for actual policy decisions, but he became sort of tarred with this and the, the anti-war faction of the party, which has been critical of Israel, decided to decided they wanted to to stop Shapiro from getting picked. There are a few other issues that came up: Shapiro had supported a school choice bill, that in Pennsylvania that teachers unions didn't like.

SEAN: Hmm.

ANDREW: Eventually, because of pressure from them, he, he ended up vetoing that bill. But that ended up kind of pleasing nobody because now the unions were still mad [that] he, he let it get that far. And, the, the school choice people were now mad that he chickened out at the end.

SEAN: Hmm.

ANDREW: Further, there were a couple of scandals specific to him that were starting to get some media attention. His chief of staff in the Pennsylvania governor's office, there was an allegation of sexual misconduct, claims about a possible cover-up.

SEAN: Wow.

ANDREW: And there was also an old case that he had some role in overseeing at the Pennsylvania Attorney General's office. This involved a young woman being… dying in, with, with many stab wounds in what was initially ruled a suicide. But her family insists it was murder. And there's a cover up and articles were being written about this. And, you know, I tend to think that we don't know why Harris made her decision, but I tend to think that all these things kind of piled up. And at the last minute it just seemed like too much. And it seemed like picking Walz would make her coalition happy. And in the end, that is what she chose to do.

SEAN: In doing so, did she potentially sacrifice Pennsylvania or sacrifice an easier path to Pennsylvania? Or is there no way to know?

ANDREW: I think there's no way to know. There's been a lot written about how VP picks don't actually make a difference, but when you look at the history a little more closely. It's very rare for a presidential candidate to actually pick a popular incumbent governor from a very important swing state as their running mate. It hasn't happened in decades. People keep making their VP picks for other reasons, like Harris apparently did this time around. So, you know, people say there's little evidence that he could have delivered Pennsylvania. I think that's fair to say. Obviously, if she ends up losing this election because of Pennsylvania, there are going to be some pretty serious…

SEAN: <laughs>

ANDREW: …second thoughts about this choice.

SEAN: There's a lot to dislike about J.D. Vance.

*<CLIP> REPUBLICAN VP CANDIDATE JD VANCE: I love you guys.*

SEAN: It feels like Democrats are having a lot of fun going after him based on his positions, based on some potentially extreme viewpoints he holds. What strategy do we think Republicans are going to take against Walz?

ANDREW: So we're starting to see early signs of this. I think they're not sure yet. Just like they're not really sure how to attack Harris yet. But the thing I've seen that has caught on most so far is that they are blaming Walz for being governor during the tumult of 2020 and the George Floyd protests, which hit Minnesota particularly hard, they’re, like, circulating pictures of buildings burning down and saying, you know, this is Tim Walz's Minnesota. This is what he wants to bring to America.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-4Drs2TmEhc)*> DONALD TRUMP (former president): Every voter in MN needs to know that when the violent mobs of anarchists and looters and Marxists (?) came to burn down Minneapolis four years ago, remember me? I couldn’t get your governor to act! <fade under and out as crowd boos>*

ANDREW: I think the more sophisticated version of the criticism is that they argue that he was was, was too weak to stand up to these rioters and, and that, he would do the same thing if in office. That, that the selection of Walz by Harris is also a sign that, the Democratic Party remains captured by the left, fearful of offending the left and deferential to the left.

SEAN: Hmm. We're going to be seeing a lot of this dude for the next, mmm, four months.

ANDREW: Three. <laughs>

SEAN: Three. Oh my God. Sorry. Great. Three. Three. Great. Starting tonight in Philadelphia. What is the Harris Walz campaign strategy moving forward, do you think, other than, you know, Project 2025, weirdos, extremist, whatever.

ANDREW: I think they want to be happy warriors.

SEAN: Mm.

ANDREW: That is kind of the vibe that they have been going for, and that Walz particularly has embraced. They want to argue that Democrats want to make people's lives better to help people. Walz talks a lot about the universal free school lunch and breakfast bill that he passed in Minnesota last year.   
  
SEAN: Mm.   
  
ANDREW: And, you know, that's the sort of thing he he wants to say: We just want to help people. We want to do common sense, ~~popular or no, we want to do commonsense~~ things to make people's lives better. In contrast to these bizarre Republicans who are obsessed with their own personal feuds and culture wars. And we and we, and we don't want to fight. We don't want to play that game. We want to, we want to help you. We care about people like you. And so I think that is what they're trying to go for. And whether it works, of course, a different question.

SCORING <Theme from The Greatest Gift>

SEAN: Andrew Prokop. Vox dot com.

NOEL: Today’s episode was produced by Peter Balonon-Rosen and Amanda Lewellyn. Edited by Matthew Collette. And fact-checking was a team effort led by Amina Al-Sadi ~~Laura Bullard~~.

SEAN: We were mixed by Patrick Boyd and Andrea Kristinsdottir. I am Sean Rameswaram. You are:

NOEL: Noel King. It’s Today, Explained.

SEAN: Boom. Bang. Bam. That’s it. We did it, Joe.

NOEL: We did it, Joe.

[10 SECONDS OF SILENCE]