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Crypto Dads, Trump Suits and Four-Letter Words: Scenes From the Cultural Frenzy at the RNC

There's more to a convention than a nomination. Inside the four-day political circus that doubled as a Trump lovefest.

By [Jacob Gallagher](#)
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MILWAUKEE — Where else this week but the [Republican National Convention](#) could you witness a man in a "Where Is The Jeffrey Epstein Client List" T-shirt mug for photos in front of a "Trump 2024" sign, beside a woman in a yolk-yellow "Don't Tread on Me" dress?

Or a young man reverently dressed as Donald Trump—orange wig, big blazer and all—pacing around and around waiting for people to notice him?

During the week, I saw a seersucker-clad Roger Stone jawing with reporters just a few feet in front of Brick Suit guy, known for going to Trump rallies dressed in, well, a red-brick suit to represent Trump's oft-referenced border wall.



I watched fleets of bike cops cycle by as attendees stopped to take selfies with former NBA player turned political activist Enes Kanter Freedom. A pair of musicians belted out a vigorous rendition of Daft Punk's "Lucky" to a crowd of no one, an unattended tactical vehicle on display

to the right of their stage.

Here, shaggy snapshots from a week in which the chaotic giddiness of the modern Trump-controlled Republican party was on full display.

The Freedom to Be Saucy



Trump is now [officially the Republican party's presidential candidate](#), but to at least two RNC speakers, he's worthy of another title: "American badass." That's how Kid Rock and Ultimate Fighting Championship president Dana White described Trump in speeches moments before the party's candidate took the stage to give his keynote.

Days earlier, another refrain echoed through the arena: "FJB, FJB, FJB, FJB." On the convention's second night, a music video by MAGA-minded rapper Forgiato Blow was beamed out to the amped-up delegates on the convention floor. The hook morphed a profane dig at [President Biden](#) into an unshakable earworm.

FJB was the unofficial acronym of the week, [visible on merch galore](#). As was the phrase "Donald Trump, because I kinda like freedom and shit." Outside the perimeter of the convention a vendor hawked tees, including a shirt that inventively injected the F-word into Chef Boyardee to jab at Biden.

From the dais, Trump's running mate, JD Vance, offered his Mamaw's love of swear words as an endearing asset. "She also loved the F-word. I'm not kidding. She could make a sailor blush," said Vance in his first public speech as Trump's VP pick. Attendees I spoke with had a similar taste for the F-word, letting it fly during interviews.

The open acceptance of profanity was striking from a party that was once nestled so tightly with family values and G-rated culture warriors.

Gambling Galore



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On Tuesday afternoon, a trio of men wandered the streets of Milwaukee's third ward with placards advertising Polymarket, billed as the "world's largest prediction market." Their red, white and blue placards hollered in big font that on Polymarket's site, Trump was leading Biden 72% to 17%. "Bet now," the placards implored.

"It works in the way the stock market works—on speculation," said Charlie Bain, one of the men, who helpfully noted that Polymarket takes crypto. He got the gig through an entertainment company that was hired by Polymarket. The job, he said, was "one of the more relaxed gigs I've had."

Smoke-Filled...Roofs

Party operatives may still meet in smoke-filled rooms, but for the Young Republicans of New York, a smoke-filled roof was preferable. On Tuesday night, New York's young GOPers assembled at a Milwaukee cigar bar with a multilevel roof that also hosts ghost tours on the south side of the city.

Picture it: boyish kids and party elders in navy blazers smoking the fattest dog-turd cigars you've ever seen. With Trump's poll numbers climbing, the mood at the party was as high as the bar itself. One of the group's leaders spoke optimistically of unseating Democratic Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, who has held the seat since 2009—a bright red sign that the party's good feelings run deep.

Crypto Confidence

Donald Trump is "America's First Crypto President." So says J. Christopher Giancarlo, former chairman of the Commodity Futures Trading Commission, who is now known as "Crypto Dad."

Early in the week, about a 20-minute walk beyond the convention's perimeter, in a brick-walled loft with the vibe of a Midwestern wedding venue, Giancarlo delivered a keynote address to 15 or so attendees, brimming with optimism about a possible Trump return to the Oval Office.

Trump, as Giancarlo framed it, was a blockchain true believer's dream. Trump's campaign was, he said, the first to accept cryptocurrency donations—totaling \$3 million in the second quarter as they reported this week. Giancarlo ticked through slides, including one dedicated to [crypto-friendly campaign trail](#) quotes from the former president, including one saying he would "ensure that the future of crypto and bitcoin will be made in the U.S.A., not driven overseas." Giancarlo was amped about Trump's vice presidential pick, JD Vance (announced just hours before), who enters the ticket with a deep bench of [crypto-friendly Silicon Valley supporters like Peter Thiel and Elon Musk](#).

"I do believe that in a second Trump term, should there be one, that crypto truly would face support and not hostility," said Giancarlo, who concluded his speech to a smattering of applause.

Never Trumpers Endure and Adapt

A room of grave-looking anti-Trump conservatives gathered at the former Pabst Blue Ribbon factory on Wednesday afternoon to lament about being on the outs of their former political family and look, even somberly, toward the future.

The term politically homeless was a common refrain, as speakers reflected on a party that to them, was unrecognizable.

"Anybody that thinks that the fever is going to break and things will return to normal anytime soon is completely wrong," cautioned Charlie Sykes, a conservative former radio host and the author of "How the Right Lost Its Mind."

In a roughly 35-minute panel discussion, Sykes and Joe Walsh, a former Republican congressman (who mentioned, as if confessing to a crime, that he voted for Trump in 2016), espoused a grim view of the Trump-led Republican party's prospects, and really, the electoral system at large. "I do believe we're living in revolutionary times. I think the two-party system is done. We just don't see it yet," said Walsh. "Use your imagination. There's going to be a third party, a fourth party."



Trump may have only appeared inside the Fiserv Forum, but outside the arena, his face was inescapable. Delegates marched around in leggings and blazers splayed with Trump's face—the elasticity of the leggings stretching his chin like Silly Putty.

"This is my president right here," said Rochelle Henshaw, an alternate delegate from Washington state, who was wearing a dress plastered with an image of open-mouthed Trump tucked into a pair of flared-out red-and-blue star jeans (they were purchased, naturally, at a rodeo).



"He's funny and I guess we just really connect with Trump," said Henshaw when asked why supporters like her are wearing Trump's visage so much.

John Tabacco of Staten Island was in a sportcoat plastered with abstract black-and-white shots of Trump's face like a MAGA-contorted Warhol canvas. Tabacco said he had an arsenal of these custom-made Trump blazers. He considered wearing his white-and-red version, but "thought with the shooting and the blood, might be a little too risqué."

Even in monochrome he made a fashion statement. As Tabacco put it, the Trumpian jackets are "snowflake-repellent."

"I hate unintellectual liberals, close-minded liberals and I would rather they stay out of my way," he said. "So the more outwardly I show them where I stand, they run."

60%



Ronald Solomon selling red caps from his Trump-themed merchandise company outside the Fiserv Forum. PHOTO: JACOB SULLAM/REUTERS

What baseball hat is selling best right now? It's a red cap with Trump written in Hebrew, according to Ronald Solomon, the owner of the MAGA Mall, a Trump-themed merchandise company. (Anecdotal evidence, eyeballing hats all week, would back this up.)

Solomon was tugging around a beach wagon stuffed with his \$20 Trump ball caps outside the Fiserv Forum—camo ones, MAGA caps, ones with Trump's jagged signature stitched on the brim. "I am very artistic, I guess," said Solomon, who designs all the hats himself.

"At the MAGA Mall, we have the Rolls-Royce caps at the Chevrolet price," said Solomon, who started the company in 2016 as a side gig to his investment banking day job.

One hat he did not plan to make? A Trump/Vance cap. "I don't really think it's necessary," said Solomon, who noted that he didn't produce a Trump/Pence cap for the 2016 race either.

"People like Trump," said Solomon with a shrug and a smile.

The Tale of the Tape

70%



© The Washington Post via Getty Images. The 2024 American flag pin is a Trump 2024 pin. Photo by Matt Rourke/Associated Press

On Monday evening, Trump made his first public appearance since [Saturday's failed assassination attempt](#), swaggering into the arena with a conspicuous white bandage on his ear.

And so, naturally, by Tuesday, delegates on the convention floor were

copying Trump with their own white rectangles affixed to their right ears, showing that where Trump goes, his supporters follow—no matter how peculiar they might look in photos.

By the convention's last night, the ear covers reached their final form: teeny American flags printed with Trump 2024.

"Donald Trump was covered by divine intervention and we feel we've all dodged a bullet," said Karen Tirio, an Illinois delegate who said she was shipped 1,500 of these matchbook sized flags to distribute by a businessman in Illinois—his website was printed on the back, making them not just symbols of solidarity but business cards as well.

Strange Booth-Fellows

On the opening day of the convention, there was much chatter about a gun-rights booth at the event's "Convention Fest" that was giving away an AR-15 gun. Notably, this was the weapon model [used in the attempt on Trump's life](#). Yet, perhaps even more striking was a vegan barbecue stand selling jackfruit brisket plopped across from this pro-second amendment stall.

The vegan food was, according to the proprietors, selling well.

Wrestling Takes Center Stage



80%

Hulk Hogan ripped his shirt open and hollered to the crowd about "bleeding like a pig" before he won a title. No, this was not WrestleMania, but the final night of the RNC, which had a raucous, unofficial theme: pro wrestling.

Other wrestling-related speakers included Linda McMahon, who made her fortune as a co-founder of World Wrestling Entertainment, alongside her husband, Vince McMahon.

Trump himself is a WWE legend—as McMahon noted in her speech, the former president was "part of the most compelling and highest rated story lines in the company's history."

At a WrestleMania event in 2007, Trump participated in the "Battle of the Billionaires" against Vince McMahon. Trump won, and McMahon had to have his head shaved.

In 2013, Trump was inducted into the WWE Hall of Fame. Said Trump in his WWE acceptance speech, "I consider this to be my greatest honor of all."

Write to Jacob Gallagher at jacob.gallagher@wsj.com

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