

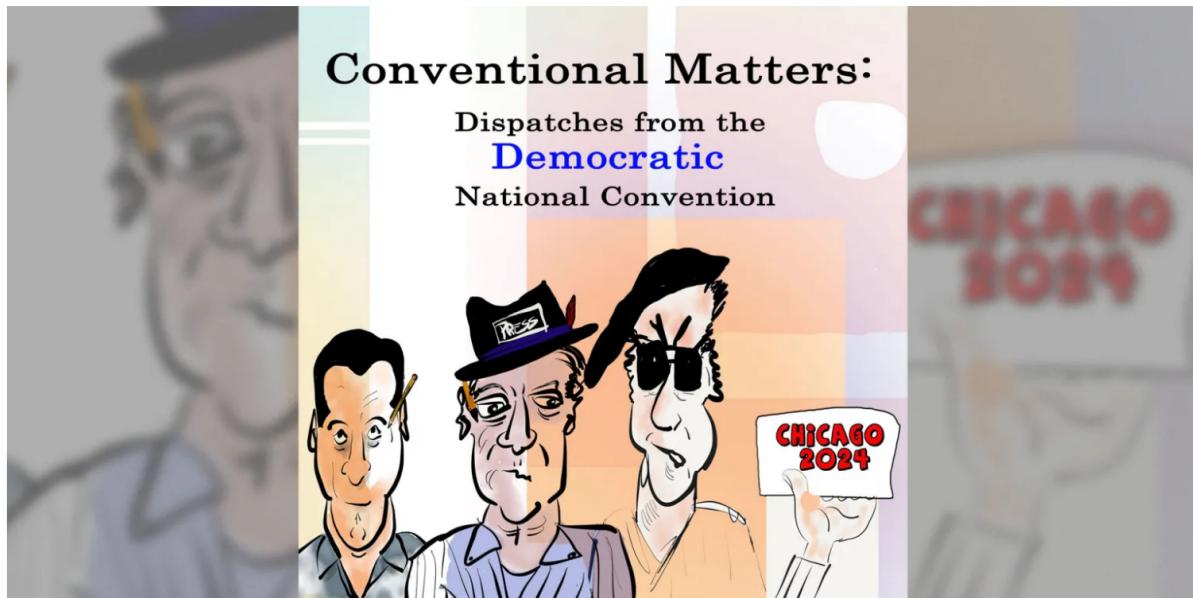
LOCAL NEWS

Day 3: Walz-ing to victory? Obama's cautious message: 'This is going to be an uphill battle'



by Joe Dworetzky, Jay Harris and David Paul, Bay City News

August 22, 2024



Bay City News reporter and cartoonist Joe Dworetzky is covering this week's Democratic National Convention in Chicago, accompanied by fellow Bay City News reporter Jay Harris and contributor David Paul. (Joe Dworetzky/Bay City News)

T HAS BEEN an astonishingly good month for Kamala Harris.

The stunning speed and nimbleness with which she grabbed the party's standard and charged forward into the battle with MAGA has been breathtaking. She has taken a campaign that was exhausted and panting for air and infused new energy, generating that greatest of all campaign affordances: momentum. And the first two days of the convention have been — as they were designed to be — a showcase for all of that enthusiasm and positivity.

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The jumbo screen feed in the Chicago arena on the night of Day 2 of the convention showed Harris and Walz walking the stage in the Milwaukee arena — a politically masterful split-screen moment. It exhilarated the crowd in Chicago. And the reciprocal video on the screen in Milwaukee did the same thing for that audience.

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And that wasn't the end of the political magic. The evening was topped off by back-to-back speeches from the Obamas. What better one-two punch could there be in Democratic politics? Watching from the arena in Chicago, it was easy to feel that the Harris/Walz ticket was inevitable.

But every campaign that gets the wind at their back struggles with the fear that the energy and momentum will lead to complacency, to volunteers who think they don't really need to knock on all those doors or call the hundredth person on their call list. Or that the voters won't bother to make the trip to the polls because it is a pain and the victory has already been locked up.

And for all the magic of Kamala's month, Donald Trump had a pretty good one the month before. It is never over until it's over, and someone on the team has to carry that message.

Barack Obama dipped his head to that issue in his closing speech ("Make no mistake: it will be a fight. For all the incredible energy we've been able to generate over the last few weeks, this will still be a tight race in a closely divided country"), but it fell to Michelle Obama to do the hard work.

"Let us not forget what we are up against," she said, "Yes, Kamala and Tim are doing great now. We're loving it. They are packing arenas across the country. Folks are energized. We are feeling good."

But with a steely expression she went on, "Remember, there are still so many people who are desperate for a different outcome, who are ready to question and criticize every move Kamala makes, who are eager to spread those lies, who don't want to vote for a woman, who will continue to prioritize building their wealth over ensuring that everyone has enough."

"So no matter how good we feel tonight, or tomorrow, or the next day, this is going to be an uphill battle."



Former First Lady Michelle Obama addresses the Democratic National Convention on Aug. 20, 2024. She cautioned the audience to not become complacent about the upcoming presidential election or its outcome. "We cannot be our own worst enemies. ... When things go bad, do something to respond. Pitch in. Fight back." (C-SPAN/Youtube)

It was a powerfully delivered caution, but that was not the point, or at least not the whole point.

"Kamala and Tim, they have lived amazing lives. ... But they are still only human. They are not perfect. And like all of us, they will make mistakes.

"So if they lie about her, and they will, we've got to do something. If we see a bad poll, and we will, we've got to put down that phone, and do something." She bore down on "do something" to make the audience understand that it would be their job to remember those words.

And most of all, "We cannot be our own worst enemies ... the minute something goes wrong, the minute a lie takes hold, folks, we cannot start wringing our hands."

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And thus her message and injunction to the party: Don't let the other side's tactics send you to bed with blankets over your head. When things go bad, do something to respond. Pitch in. Fight back.

When that happens, she said, "we've got to pick ourselves up, throw water on our face and ..." the audience shouted back "DO Something."

Her final call to action was sober: "This election is going to be close. In some states, just a handful — listen to me — a handful of votes in every precinct could decide the winner. So we need to vote in numbers that erase any doubt. We need to overwhelm any effort to suppress us. Our fate is in our hands."

It doesn't take sight to have a vision

At the DNC's Disability Caucus on Tuesday, Janni Lehrer-Stein's guide dog Shiloh was sporting a "Coconuts for Kamala" bandana.

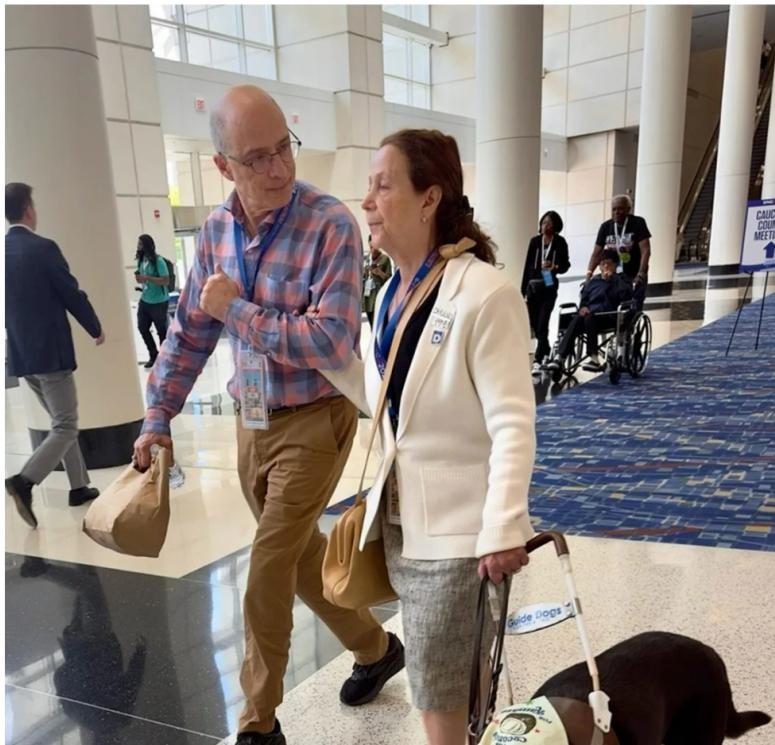
Lehrer-Stein, who lives in San Francisco, is blind from retinitis pigmentosa. She's been a leader in the disability rights movement for years — she calls disability rights "the last frontier of civil rights." And she is also a very impassioned Democrat.

When she was diagnosed, Lehrer-Stein was 26, a young lawyer in Washington, D.C., newly married and on top of the world. One snowy winter day, she went to see a doctor about an "annoying, itchy eye infection." The doctor gave her drops for the infection but then dropped a bomb: "You have an inherited retinal degenerative disease, and you'll probably be blind within the next six months."

"But don't worry too much about that," he told her, "Because most people like you, they get hit by a bus before they ever go totally blind."

And that was how she was plopped into the disability community.

In an interview Tuesday, Lehrer-Stein, now 68, said, "I'm happy to report that I have stayed out of the way of that bus for just about 40 years. But it changed my life in so many ways. Lenny (Stein, her husband) and I had to think about the fact that I could no longer drive, that I was going to have to be able to navigate. And I wanted to have children and raise a family in an environment that was friendly to people that don't drive." They chose San Francisco.





Janni Lehrer-Stein walks with her guide dog Shiloh at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago on Aug. 19, 2024. Blind from a degenerative eye disease for more than 40 years, the San Francisco resident has been an active advocate for disability rights. (Lenny Stein via Bay City News)

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"The wonderful thing about San Francisco that it is such an accessible city to pedestrians. We live near Fillmore Street. I can walk myself to any number of stores, to yoga classes, to shopping, the bank. Anything I want to do, I can do alone with my dog because we live in San Francisco. ... We were able to find a place where I could do everything I needed to do as a professional, a wife, a mother, a daughter, a sister, an advocate by myself with my cane or my dog."

During Barack Obama's presidency, Lehrer-Stein was appointed to the [National Council on Disability](#), serving two terms. In the 2016 presidential campaign, she was one of Hillary Clinton's three disability policy advisors; sounding grateful, she says Clinton "completely immersed us in the campaign." And in 2019, she was disability policy advisor to Kamala Harris's presidential primary campaign, "and there was never a moment when she would not take the extra five minutes to greet me, plant a huge kiss on Shiloh's nose, and say, 'so tell me what's happening.'"

The 'curb-cut effect'

Lehrer-Stein has a personal story about Harris's "compassion."

"In October (2019), right before her campaign ended, Lenny had a very serious car accident. He was in the emergency room and in surgery. ... It was a tough time for us, and we had gathered the children, and it was pretty intense. And in the middle of the night comes a text, 'Janni, this is Kamala. We heard about Lenny. What can we do to help you?'"

"This," Lehrer-Stein said, "is compassion we have not seen really expressed directly to our community before." She credits Harris with "tenacity, compassion, and respect for the dignity of everyone."

Lehrer-Stein says that as California's Attorney General, Harris "did some really wonderful things for the disability community, including a landmark case that she filed on behalf of a firefighter who was injured on the job and then was denied his employment and disability benefits. ... It was not as public as her taking on the banks the way she did. But she was demonstrating from her earliest time that she was truly a

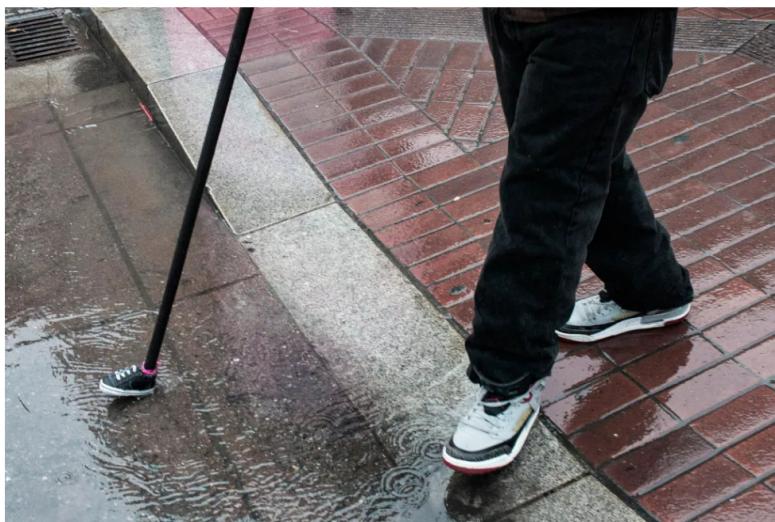
member of our community and that she cared about the people in our community.

"Watching what she has done in the Senate and now as vice president, we have seen her grow into this remarkable stateswoman who always thinks about what she says before she says it and is always willing to take time."

"It's one of her, I think, most powerful and compelling characteristics. And the reason she is beloved in the Bay Area."

For disabled people — dealing with blindness or mobility limitations or any number of other conditions that the abled often put out of mind — getting around is frequently hard. Lehrer-Stein remembers well the "Capitol Crawl," the demonstration in March 1990 when disabled activists got out of their wheelchairs and crawled up the steps of the U.S. Capitol to rally support for the [Americans with Disabilities Act](#).

But thanks to the ADA and subsequent legislation, there has been progress — for everyone. Lehrer-Stein points to "the curb-cut effect."



A pedestrian uses a curb cut in San Francisco on Dec. 24, 2018. Today commonplace throughout the U.S. thanks to the Americans with Disabilities Act, it was born from the disability rights movement in the 1990s. (Ken Walton/Flickr, CC BY-SA)

"In 1990, people were not ready to spend government money to assist us. But what we discovered as those curb cuts went into effect was that everybody uses curb cuts — people with strollers and people on bicycles. And these scooters that I fear for my life from. And kids with their rolling suitcases and the mail people. Everybody uses the curb cut. And now it is part and ingrained and embedded in our society."

She went on, "What I think about as a disability rights advocate is how to universalize the fact that when you make life more inclusive and accessible for people with disabilities, you actually improve the quality of life for us all."

There is much more work to be done. But Lehrer-Stein is hopeful — she's felt a cultural shift.

"When I walk down the street in San Francisco (with Shiloh), nine times out of 10, it's a little kid I hear saying to their mom, 'Oh, that dog is working. You have to ask before you touch it.' So this generation that is rising behind us is a generation where a full group has already grown up under the protections of the ADA. The second generation is making it just part of everyday life, which is so wonderful."

"(Mattel) just introduced the first Blind Barbie. Did you know about that?"





Janni Lehrer-Stein with Kamala Harris in San Francisco in an undated image. (Lenny Stein via Bay City News)

An American Story from Berkeley

Igor Tregub is a newly elected member of the Berkeley City Council and a delegate to the Democratic National Convention for District 12. He is serious and gives out a wonky and intense air when he talks, as if he is carefully evaluating whether each word is the precisely correct one to best explain what he means.

Tregub was born in the Ukraine and came to the U.S. with his family when he was 10. He and his family are Jewish, and he has a deep-seated reverence for the democracy he and his family found here. His parents started in Knoxville, Tennessee, but then moved to Southern California where he grew up.

He describes his family “cramming into a one-bedroom apartment in San Diego where my parents were trying to eke out a living, eventually, through Democratic policies, being able to get, you know, elevate themselves into the middle class, being able to afford a home,” he added, “the cheapest home on the block.”

He came north to attend the University of California at Berkeley in 2002 and “fell in love with this community. And has been a home for me ever since.”

At Cal he studied mechanical engineering and political science, two disciplines that are not frequently combined, but Tregub’s career so far has been a marriage of them.

When he lists his extensive skill set, he emphasizes both his political skills (Community Engagement, Strategic Planning, Communication, Governmental Affairs, Stakeholder Engagement) and his scientific skill: (Engineering, Regulatory Affairs, Conceptual Design). But he doesn’t separate them in two different buckets; rather, he presents all of them as intertwined and part of his whole package.

He was a research assistant in a thermal hydraulics



laboratory at Berkeley, where he among other things “conducted a feasibility study and cost-benefit analysis of an advanced high-temperature nuclear reactor.”



Igor Tregub is the District 4 representative on the Berkeley City Council. (Igor Tregub via Bay City News file)

For 12 years he worked at the U.S. Department of Energy as an engineer and program manager. He had multiple assignments and responsibilities including serving as an advisor to the DOE Attaché in Kazakhstan and running projects at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory.

In 2023 he became a Strategic Partnerships Director for Reimagine Power, which he says is “leading transformative campaigns to advance energy democracy, one multifamily rooftop solar, battery storage, microgrid, and EV charging system at a time.”

On the political and community side of the equation, he has been on a dozen local boards, commissions, and task forces, including serving as a commissioner on the Berkeley Rent Board, and chair of the Zoning Adjustment Board.

Tregub is all in on the Democratic Party’s talking points. In his precise and deliberate style, he can list all the Biden administration’s signature accomplishments, and he does so with enthusiasm and great joy.

“For refugees like me, (the election) truly is a choice between ensuring that this is a home for everyone ... and going backwards into the dark ages amplified by hate and despotism.”

Igor Tregub, DNC delegate from Berkeley

But while many of those accomplishments have significant local impact in the areas where Tregub spends his time — e.g., energy policy, the funding of infrastructure — when he talks about the election, the issues that most animate him are those that flow from his family’s coming to the United States as immigrants and building a new life here.

“For refugees like me, (the election) truly is a choice between ensuring that this is a home for everyone who works hard and seeks to make this a home, and going backwards into the dark ages amplified by hate and despotism.

“The value of ensuring that this is a place that everyone can call home, it’s not just a democratic value, it’s a human value. And, unfortunately, there is only one party that really believes in that value through the policies that they try to affect. And that is the Democratic Party.”

The durable empowering of attorneys

Oakland City Attorney Barbara Parker, has served for 13 years in the high-stress job of managing the city’s always complicated and sometimes messy legal affairs. She was initially appointed to complete another’s term, but the position is an elected one and when that term came to an end, she had to consider running for the post.

At the time, Kamala Harris was the elected District Attorney in San Francisco and a very visible Black attorney. Parker didn’t know her and wasn’t sure that Harris would even know who she was. Nevertheless, Parker reached out to see if she could get some advice on how one approached running for public office. She knew Harris was busy — it was budget season and there were ongoing hearings — but she hoped she could get a few minutes.

Parker was surprised when Harris responded to her inquiry, “Of course I know who you are.” She invited Parker to her office and spent two to three hours with her. She answered Parker’s questions and gave her practical and strategic advice.

Parker described her reaction to Harris at the time. "She's very matter of fact and clear and direct, you can see that. But she's a very thoughtful person and very comfortable and I think has a great deal of emotional intelligence, as well as just the brain power in terms of dealing with people, sizing people up."

But her biggest impression was surprise at Harris's generosity with her time. "There was no benefit to her except the benefit of having communication and supporting another person running for office and the willingness to share what she gained from her experience."

The experience has stayed with Parker to this day and is a big part of the reason she is so happy to see Harris running against Trump.

But it's not the only reason. Parker said that so far in the campaign Harris is not just "confident and precise and very sharp, but that she is joyous. She's happy. She seems to be a person who enjoys life and is comfortable in her own skin. And that joyousness and light is also, I think, appealing to the youth, the younger folks who feel that that energy."

A new course for crypto?

Outside the convention, a program for delegates and convention attendees called [CryptoDNC](#) raised the question of how a Harris/Walz administration would deal with crypto and blockchain.

A similar program run by the same people at the Republican National Convention had considered how a Trump/Vance administration would address those issues.

At that time the general view was that a Trump administration would be positive-ish for crypto and Biden/Harris would be negative. Now with Harris at the top of the ticket, the question was whether the Democrats might be more supportive. Might Harris — being younger and arguably more fluent with tech than Biden — chart a new course?

It was an interesting question, but of course there was no answer. Harris has only started to put out her positions on the most important issue, and despite the impatience of the digital-native crowd, blockchain is nowhere near the top of the list.

Gwen Walz introduces herself

When the Secret Service entered the room, it was easy to guess that a surprise had been added to the meeting of the DNC's Disability Caucus. As the three beefy men with earpieces stared intently at the 200 people gathered, Gwen Walz entered the room to introduce herself.

Tim Walz's wife was a high school English teacher. Speaking with a touch of Minnesotan accent, she told this story:

"I'd like to tell you just a little bit about the way Tim and I partnered in our work together. And it's through a little story from one of our students, and his name is Waylon.

"Waylon was a football player that Tim coached on his team, and he was a student in my English classroom. And Waylon was brilliant on the football field, but difficult in my classroom. You maybe know students like that or were students like that. But in this case, Waylon was reading way below his grade level, and he was acting out in my classroom. And that was just an attempt to kind of throw us off the scent or to hide from his peers,



Minnesota First Lady Gwen Walz embraces her husband Tim Walz following his vice presidential nomination acceptance speech

and also from me, what the real issue was. But the school had a policy that a student who was failing a core class could not participate in a sport.

Wednesday night at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago.
(Partial framegrab via C-SPAN/YouTube)

"And that was the school rule. And that's a tough rule because the thing that was really keeping Waylon in school probably was that activity. And so, I thought, this is going to be an issue, right?

"So I huddled up with Coach Walz, and we made a plan, and we talked to Waylon about it. I asked him to come and see me, and I said, 'Waylon, if you come into tutoring several times a week — we can do it before school or during lunch or even after school if we have time — you can keep on playing football. That's what your measure is going to be, coming in for those extra sessions, and we'll be making progress.' He agreed, and he began to work hard. Waylon's reading began to improve, and he continued the tutoring even after the season ended.

"We saw Waylon as an individual, as a student, and that was one student, and one student of many. But that's how you make a difference. (Waylon) just kept right on reading. And Tim would often cross over that thin divider in our classroom before school, during lunch or after school, and he would read with Waylon, and they would choose books together. Tim cheered him on. And at the end of the year, Waylon had competence both on and off the field."

Walz concluded by quoting her mother: "My mom used to say to me, Gwen, you have to do the work that is in front of you."

And what is that work, she asked the delegates. "What do you see with your own eyes, looking at the world in front of you? How can you make a difference in this election and in this race? ... Our lives depend on it."

Tim Walz gets the last word

There was great anticipation for Tim Walz's speech Wednesday night.

On Tuesday, former President Obama said, "I love this guy" and quipped "he doesn't get his shirts from a political consultant, he gets them from his closet."

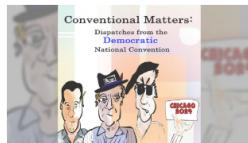
In the messaging coming from the campaign, Walz is clearly being assigned the role of the folksy, rumpled, straight-shooting, schoolteacher, one who has a special gift for language:





"Walz" (Joe Dworetzky/Bay City News)

Bay City News staff writer Joe Dworetzky is in Chicago with fellow BCN reporter Jay Harris and correspondent David Paul to report on the daily drama and curiosities at the Democratic National Convention. [Learn more about their work here.](#)



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