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Subject: ★ AM: It's Harris' big night. What we're watching for

Plus, Hickenlooper makes news at Punchbowl News HQ | Presented by Amazon

Aug. 22, 2024
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IN THIS EDITION

- What we're watching for on Harris' big night
- Walz struts onto the national stage
- Fletcher on Dems' chances in Texas and the future of energy policy
- Hickenlooper to seek reelection in 2026 for final term
- The Canvass rapid polling at the DNC Day 3

THE TOP

What we're watching for on Harris' big night



Happy Thursday morning.

Vice President Kamala Harris will take the stage tonight to cap off what's been a successful convention for Democrats so far. It's the biggest moment in the California native's political career, and it'll kick off a 75-day sprint to Election Day for Harris and former President Donald Trump.

President Joe Biden passed the mantle of Democratic standard-bearer to Harris on Monday, a delicate yet necessary transition if the party was going to have any real chance of winning in November. And Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz debuted on the national stage as Harris' VP pick Wednesday night (more below).

The Obamas and Clintons made big speeches. Democrats look as united as they have all cycle. Harris' fundraising is stunning, and the TV ratings have been good. Threatened protests over Israel's war in Gaza largely didn't materialize, thanks in part to an overwhelming security presence around the United Center.

Now comes another serious test for Harris — a convention speech as the Democratic presidential nominee. After watching three Democratic presidents on the stage in Chicago this week, Harris wants to show everyone why she should join that ultra-exclusive club.

This is a historic moment. We couldn't possibly overstate it if we tried. Harris is only the second woman to be a major party presidential nominee. She's the first Black woman and first person of Asian American heritage in this spot. Harris would be only the second California-born president (Richard Nixon) if she wins. And like Biden, she's trying to make the transition from VP to president. There [have only been a handful](#) of them to win the office on their own.

Here are some of the key issues to listen for during Harris' speech. Of course, it's a convention speech, meaning it'll be heavy on rhetoric and light on details. But these topics will have to be touched on, so we'll see how Harris handles them.

Inflation, the economy and the high cost of living: This is the biggest problem for Democrats, and it's an area where Trump and Republicans have a clear edge. The [announcement Wednesday](#) by the Labor Department that it was revising this year's job gains downward by more than 800,000 jobs, while expected, shows the U.S. economy isn't as strong as it appears to be.

Harris unveiled part of her economic agenda [last week](#), touting an "opportunity economy" to help more Americans join the middle class. Harris promised to go after price gouging on groceries, help in getting a \$25,000 down payment for first-time homebuyers, build three million new homes and rental properties, expand the child tax credit, cut medical debt and more. Harris will need to keep building this out.

Trump: How hard will Harris go after Trump personally? Trump has called Harris a "DEI hire," questioned her racial identity and intelligence, tried to label her "Comrade Kamala," trotted out an [apparently false Willie Brown story](#) and often mispronounces her name.

Harris needs to figure out how she handles these personal swipes from Trump. He's going to keep doing it. Trump wants to turn this campaign into a grudge match between himself and Harris. Hillary Clinton struggled with this in confronting Trump, as did Biden. Now it's Harris' turn.

Biden: Harris and Biden [hugged onstage](#) this week following the president's emotional Monday speech. The VP will embrace the popular parts of Biden's legacy as president — especially the long list of legislative accomplishments — while avoiding the negative ones, including on inflation, the economy and immigration. That may be easier said than done.

Israel and the war in Gaza: This is largely beyond Harris' control, yet the issue continues to split the party and the country. Harris has leaned hard into calling for a ceasefire in Gaza and lamenting the massive toll of Palestinian casualties, going further than Biden in some cases. But she's not president, so her options to affect the outcome are limited here.

Immigration and border security: Illegal migrant crossings [are down dramatically](#) at the U.S.-Mexico border, although this issue remains a key vulnerability for Harris.

There was a heavy focus on immigration Wednesday night at the convention, with speakers repeatedly playing up the fact that Trump and Speaker Mike Johnson blew up a bipartisan border security deal earlier this year in order to keep the issue as a political cudgel. We'll see if Harris continues to beat that same drum.

Democracy and freedom: This is among Harris' biggest strengths. She's made "freedom" the underlying theme of her campaign, using it as a frame to talk about Democratic priorities such as abortion access, gun violence and voting rights. Beyoncé's "Freedom" has even become her unofficial campaign anthem.

It's a familiar message for the party. Biden framed the stakes of the 2020 election as democracy being on the line, as did Democrats running in the 2022 midterms. But now Harris has put her own stamp on it and given voters a new rallying cry.

— John Bresnahan and Melanie Zanona



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Health care benefits started on day one for Caleb and his family when he joined an Amazon fulfillment center in Newark, New Jersey. "It gives me peace of mind knowing that my entire family can be taken care of," he said.

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As the largest job creator in the U.S. Amazon is committed to helping their employees and the communities where they operate thrive with benefits starting on day one and free on-the-job skills training programs to grow their careers.

[See the impact of day one benefits.](#)

THE DNC

Walz struts onto the national stage

CHICAGO — Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz introduced himself to the American public on Wednesday with intimate stories of his personal life, military experience and tenure as a public school teacher, all while pitching himself as a “good neighbor.”

During a highly anticipated speech to the Democratic convention, the 60-year-old Walz touted his middle-class upbringing and family values while addressing Democrats on his plans to cut taxes, protect reproductive rights and put workers first.

The former House member called the chance to become Vice President Kamala Harris’ running mate the “honor of his life.”

“You might not know it but I haven’t given a lot of speeches like this, but I have given a lot of pep talks,” Walz joked.

Walz — who had one of the shortest speeches of the night — was met with an enthusiastic crowd holding signs that read “Coach Walz.” And Walz went heavy on the football talk, saying that Democrats need to make a comeback to keep the White House:

“It’s the fourth quarter. We’re down a field goal. But we’re on offense, and we’ve got the ball. We’re driving down the field. And, boy, do we have the right team.”

The two-term governor was joined by his wife Gwen Walz and his children, Gus and Hope Walz, at the end of his address.

Gwen Walz introduced her husband via video where she promoted him as a family man and outdoorsman, noting that the governor is a gun owner. Walz was endorsed by the NRA when he first ran for Congress in 2006, although [he now backs](#) an assault weapons ban and other gun-control measures.

Walz hit Republicans on their efforts to roll back abortion access and women’s health care, citing he and his wife’s own experiences with infertility before having two children.

“If you’ve never experienced the hell that is infertility, I guarantee you know someone who has,” Walz said.

In referencing his 12 years in the House, Walz talked about his belief in bipartisanship. As governor, Walz mentioned his efforts to lower taxes for the middle class, expand affordable housing and offer free lunches to students as some of his proudest accomplishments.

Benjamin Ingman, one of Walz’s former students, introduced the governor. Several other former students shared stories of having Walz as a teacher with their own video messages.

Night Three of the DNC also featured former President Bill Clinton and former Speaker Nancy Pelosi, as well as a trove of Hill Democrats. Oprah Winfrey, making a special appearance, made a plea to independent and undecided voters to support Harris and Walz.

The convention will wrap tonight with Harris formally accepting the nomination to be the Democratic nominee.

— Mica Soellner



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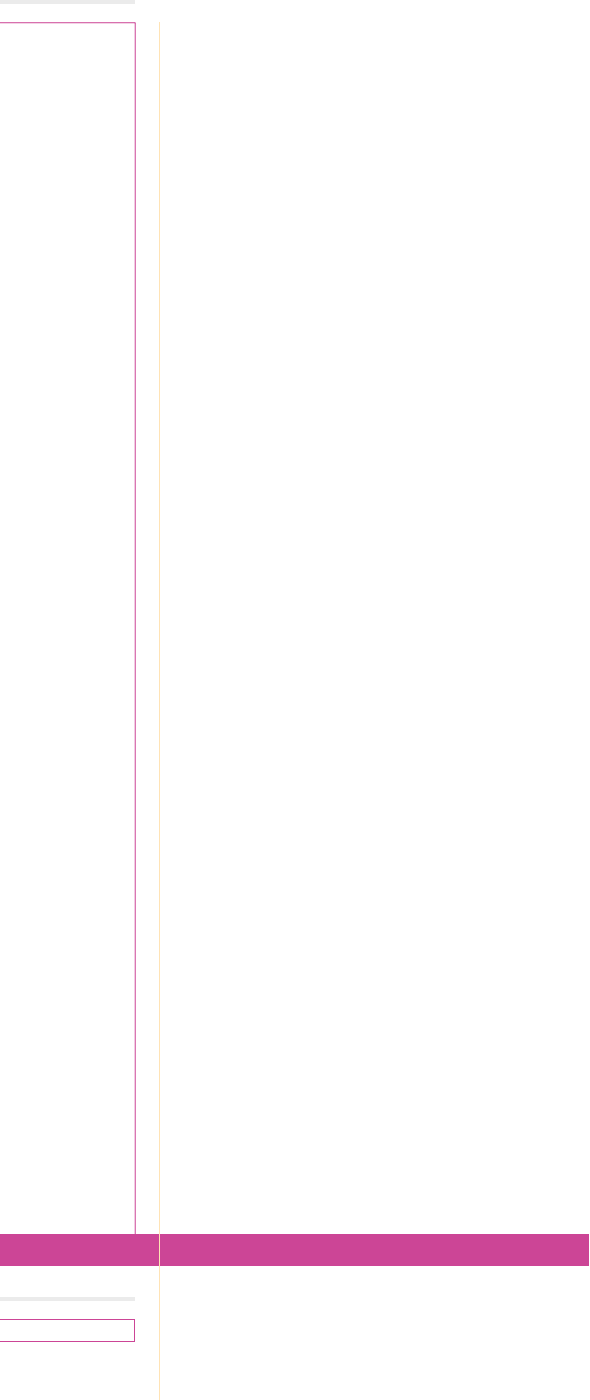
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PUNCHBOWL NEWS EVENTS

Fletcher on Dems' chances in Texas and the future of energy policy





CHICAGO — Rep. Lizzie Fletcher (D-Texas) joined us on Wednesday on the sidelines of the Democratic National Convention for a conversation presented by ExxonMobil at Punchbowl News HQ. Fletcher projected confidence that Democrats can compete in the Lone Star State this election cycle.

The third-term lawmaker also criticized the Biden administration's decision to pause new export applications for liquefied natural gas and lamented what she described as the politicization of energy as a "wedge issue" on Capitol Hill. Here are some key takeaways from the conversation.

Turning Texas blue? Fletcher was [very bullish](#) on Democrats' decadeslong dream of turning the state of Texas blue. Democrats have made such grand predictions before, but Texas remains a reliably red state.

Still, Democrats are convinced that their Senate candidate, Rep. Colin Allred (D-Texas), has a chance to defeat Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas).

"I think we're going to see an incredibly close campaign," Fletcher said. "What you're seeing, too, is [the infrastructure being built](#) ... It's not just going to happen. It's going to happen because people do the work to make it happen."

LNG export pause: Fletcher has been [critical](#) of the Biden administration's decision earlier this year to pause approvals of new liquefied natural gas export applications. Fletcher said exporting LNG is in the economic and national security of the United States.

"The real concern is the uncertainty it creates both in the markets for our allies and others," Fletcher said, adding that the pause affects long-term projects and contracts.

But Fletcher said she was hopeful that the Biden administration will soon conclude that exporting LNG is "the smart thing to do."

Permitting reform: Permitting reform is a perpetual will-they-or-won't-they conversation on Capitol Hill. There's broad bipartisan support for making it easier for energy projects of all types to be approved, but Congress has yet to take action.

Fletcher [cited](#) the Senate Energy Committee's recent vote to approve a bipartisan permitting reform proposal, saying she hopes it'll be considered as part of the year-end must-pass legislative packages.

The Texas Democrat — who serves on the Energy and Commerce Committee — called the Senate bill "a really good start." Fletcher said it's critical for Congress to act on this subject in order to accelerate the implementation of the bipartisan bills that lawmakers passed during President Joe Biden's first two years in office.

Fireside chat: Dr. Vijay Swarup, ExxonMobil's senior director for climate strategy and technology, joined us afterward to continue the conversation on energy.

Swarup said permitting reform [will help accelerate](#) the nation's energy transition, particularly allowing existing infrastructure to be repurposed for new projects.

"You've got to reuse that and let the technology guys figure out how to reuse the assets," Swarup said.

Private companies should work with the federal government to [meet the country's energy demands](#) while also reducing emissions, Swarup added.

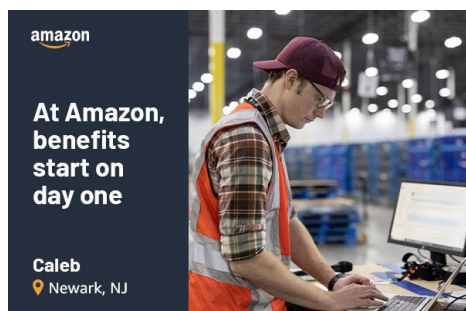
"Who's going to disagree with that problem statement?" Swarup said. "If you get the problem right, you have a much higher probability of getting the answer right."

You can watch the full [conversation here](#).

—Andrew Desiderio



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Hickenlooper to seek reelection in 2026 for final term



CHICAGO – Sen. John Hickenlooper (D-Colo.) announced Wednesday he will run for reelection in 2026 but added his second term will be his last.

Hickenlooper was speaking at our Punchbowl News HQ on the sidelines of the Democratic National Convention where he also discussed Democrats' chances of keeping the Senate majority and other key issues on Congress' plate. Hickenlooper, a geologist, brewer and former Colorado governor, came to the Senate in 2021.

"I'm only going to do two terms," [Hickenlooper, 72, told us.](#) "I said it first here. Two-term limit. Oath of conscience."

Other top takeaways:

Harris momentum: Hickenlooper compared the enthusiasm that Vice President Kamala Harris' campaign has sparked, especially among young voters, to former President Barack Obama's 2008 run for the White House. Hickenlooper was mayor of Denver during Obama's first campaign.

"That was the last time I've seen anything close to this," [Hickenlooper said.](#) "The level of excitement and enthusiasm is off the charts."

Vulnerable colleagues: Hickenlooper said he expects Sens. Jon Tester (D-Mont.) and Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio) to hold on to their seats as they face tough races this year against well-funded GOP challengers in red states. Hickenlooper acknowledged split-ticket voters, who would have once boosted vulnerable Democrats, have "diminished." Still, the Colorado Democrat said both Tester and Brown know how to run their own races and appeal to a broad swath of voters.

"Jon Tester and Sherrod Brown are two of the best senators of either party in the Senate and have deep respect in their home states," [Hickenlooper said.](#) "I think both of them are going to win."

Policy fights: Hickenlooper also discussed key issues facing Congress, including how to legislate on artificial intelligence, expiring tax cuts, Ukraine aid and permitting reform. The former Colorado governor echoed the optimism of an [earlier panel](#) of energy CEOs that legislation to overhaul the permitting process is likely to pass.

Hickenlooper said there is "absolutely a chance" that provisions related to permitting reform could be attached to must-pass legislation. And regarding Ukraine, Hickenlooper criticized Republicans for opposing efforts to send additional money to the embattled U.S. ally as it continues its fight against Russia.

You can watch the full conversation with [Hickenlooper here.](#)

— Mica Soellner



THE CAMPAIGN

News: The NRSC is rolling out new independent-expenditure ads in Michigan and Nevada, two battleground states where Republicans are looking to pick up Senate seats.

The ads, which will air on television and digitally, are part of the NRSC's \$100 million ad barrage announced earlier this summer. The NRSC didn't specify how much they're spending on each.

The new [Michigan ad](#) features a sheriff slamming Rep. Elissa Slotkin (D-Mich.), who's facing off against former Rep. Mike Rogers (R-Mich.) for the Wolverine State's open Senate seat. Sen. Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.) is retiring at the end of this Congress.

In Nevada, the NRSC is unveiling three new ads targeting Sen. Jacky Rosen (D-Nev.). The ads center on Rosen's [personal](#) and [campaign](#) finances.

In other campaign news: EMILY's List is endorsing Dr. Kristin Lyerly in Wisconsin's 8th District. Lyerly is an [OB-GYN](#) who is [centering reproductive rights](#) in her campaign. This is the seat vacated by former Rep. Mike Gallagher's (R-Wis.) retirement.

— Andrew Desiderio



THE CANVASS

The Canvass rapid polling at the DNC Day 3

The third night of the Democratic convention brought Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz to the main stage as well as another round of the party's big names, including former Speaker Nancy Pelosi, former President Bill Clinton and Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, Maryland Gov. Wes Moore and even Oprah Winfrey.

As we're doing all week, we asked top Hill aides and K Street leaders for their responses to Wednesday evening's speeches for our survey. [The Canvass.](#)

What to expect in Midday today: We checked in with senior Hill staffers and downtown leaders for their thoughts on how Walz is performing on the campaign trail so far. We also wanted to know whether they thought his DNC speech was effective in helping Vice President Kamala Harris.

In our [Tuesday night poll](#), Canvass respondents were split on whether Walz was Harris' best pick for a running mate, with just 44% saying he was the right choice and 47% disapproving. We'll find out if Walz's speech last night swayed K Street leaders and top Hill aides.

Respondents to the survey — conducted in partnership with LSG — also share what they think about the Democrats' strategy of continually talking about immigration, attacks on abortion and on reproductive rights, and their concerns

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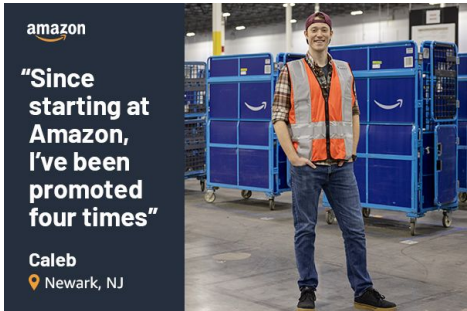
about former president Donald Trump.

In addition, we asked respondents what they think of Republicans who have spoken at the DNC and whether those speakers could help woo moderate Republicans and swing voters to support Harris. Look out for the full results in our Midday edition today.

— Elvina Nawaguna



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MOMENTS

ALL TIMES EASTERN

1 p.m.

President Joe Biden will get his daily intelligence briefing.

10:45 p.m.

Vice President Kamala Harris will deliver the keynote address at the Democratic National Convention.

CLIPS

NYT

[Political Memo: "Democrats Use the Convention to Try to Define Trump as a Self-Interested Fraud"](#)

— Maggie Haberman and Jonathan Swan in Chicago

Bloomberg

["Harris Had More Donors in 11 Days Than Biden Did Over Entire Run"](#)

— Tanaz Meghji, Andre Tartar, Bill Allison, and Dave Merrill

AP

["Elite prosecutor misused position by offering Justice Department card in DUI stop, watchdog finds"](#)

— Joshua Goodman and Jim Mustian

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Since starting at an Amazon fulfillment center in Newark, New Jersey, Caleb has grown his family without worrying about health care. "With Amazon's healthcare benefits I know my entire family can be taken care of without questioning how we're going to afford anything," he said.

[Learn more about Amazon's comprehensive benefits.](#)

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