

# [***Opinion: No one has played their cards better than Doug Burgum***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6C1G-10M1-DY7V-G06C-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; The race to become former President Donald Trump's vice-presidential choice has taken an unexpected turn - the current frontrunner, if you believe the DC buzz machine, is a western governor who, this time last year, very few people had ever heard of.

Meet North Dakota's Gov. [*Doug Burgum*](https://www.cnn.com/videos/politics/2024/05/05/sotu-burgum-full-interview.cnn). He, too, [*ran for president*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/12/04/politics/doug-burgum-suspends-campaign/index.html) in the Republican primary, made a couple of debate stages, never escaped [*low single digits in polling*](https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/23823977-cnn-poll-trump-leads-2024-gop-primary-field-but-voters-are-open-to-supporting-other-candidates) and eventually, like the rest of the candidates, succumbed to the [*Trump juggernaut*](https://www.cnn.com/politics/live-news/election-campaign-news-01-14-24/h_af1e37b019f427efa5d9f69fca1d86d6).

But since then, no one has played their cards better than the affable former businessman-turned-governor of the Peace Garden State (although Burgum would dispute that he even knows how to play political poker at all), and now he finds himself as well positioned as anyone to vault onto the national ticket.

Burgum was elected governor of North Dakota the same night [*Trump*](https://www.cnn.com/2016/11/09/politics/donald-trump-victory-speech/index.html) was elected president in 2016, having never before sought public office. Both men ran outsider campaigns to upend insider types in their primary and general elections.

After eight years as governor, Burgum's got a story to tell. [*North Dakota*](https://www.governor.nd.gov/governor-doug-burgum) is [*thriving economically*](https://www.ibisworld.com/united-states/economic-profiles/north-dakota/#EconomicOverview), ranks [*second in energy production per capita*](https://energynd.com/uploads/1/spotlightonenergy2022webv12.pdf) and has a [*low unemployment rate*](https://fred.stlouisfed.org/graph/?g=1gsmR). When talking to Burgum about his record, you can feel a passion for innovation and a true understanding of what the federal government can do to help - and hurt - individual states, especially when it comes to [*energy policy*](https://transcripts.cnn.com/show/sotu/date/2024-05-05/segment/01).

After ending his presidential campaign, Burgum [*immediately endorsed Trump*](https://www.cnn.com/politics/live-news/election-campaign-news-01-14-24/h_af1e37b019f427efa5d9f69fca1d86d6) and became a reliable surrogate. Refreshingly, Burgum is not the performative or theatrical sort, and it shows. The North Dakota governor conveys an earnestness and a deeply held belief that the country must be saved from another Biden term.

"Working with President Trump as a governor was like having a beautiful breeze at your back," [*Burgum said at a huge Trump rally in New Jersey*](https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2024-election/vp-contender-doug-burgum-joins-trump-campaign-rally-new-jersey-rcna151845) this past weekend. He added that the "Biden regulatory regime is like having a gale force wind in your face because the Biden bureaucrats are treating our constitutional republic like a dictatorship."

Clearly, Trump also likes Burgum personally. During Trump's presidency, Burgum's wife, [*Kathryn*](https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/kathryn-burgum-wife-gov-doug-burgum-opens-mental/story?id=104135111), [*attended a White House event*](https://www.governor.nd.gov/news/first-lady-helgaas-burgum-attends-white-house-opioid-event-president-signs-support-patients) on fighting addiction. She's been a powerful advocate for those, like herself, who suffered from alcoholism, and Trump has publicly reflected on his late brother's [*battle with the disease*](https://www.cnn.com/2019/08/08/politics/donald-trump-fred-trump-alcoholism/index.html).

What's the argument for Burgum? He's a middle America governor who cares more about the economy and the intersection of energy policy and national security than political self-aggrandizement, a self-made businessman who could be a boon to Trump campaign fundraising and a no-drama governing partner who clearly has a passion for [*taming federal bureaucracy*](https://www.governor.nd.gov/news/burgum-backs-lawsuit-against-biden-administrations-vaccine-mandate-private-businesses).

Oh - and he hasn't turned his Dakota into a gruesome pet cemetery, [*unlike his neighbor to the South*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/05/03/politics/kristi-noem-book-trump-vp-shortlist/index.html).

If you consider Trump to be, in his heart, a casting director, there's no one in America who looks and sounds more like a loyal vice president than Burgum, who even [*accompanied Trump*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/05/14/politics/trump-allies-courthouse-appearances/index.html) in court on Tuesday to show his support. Burgum has proven capable in [*business*](https://www.forbes.com/sites/kylemullins/2023/11/08/just-how-rich-is-gop-presidential-candidate-doug-burgum/?sh=29994975eff6) and government, and Trump must surely appreciate the hustle of Burgum defending him against what the former president believes to be a criminal case [*motivated by* ***politics***](https://www.cnn.com/politics/live-news/trump-impeachment-news-01-12-21/h_84f052b220edbab121f61f4970f93e47). Of course, Burgum is hardly the only Republican politician to make a visit to the newest stop on the VP hopeful tour. Ohio Sen. J.D. Vance accompanied the presumptive GOP presidential nominee to the Manhattan courtroom on Monday.

"You won't find anybody better than this gentleman in terms of his knowledge ... he probably knows more about energy than anybody I know. So, get ready for something, okay, just get ready. But Doug Burgum has been incredible," [*Trump said of his Jersey Shore stage mate.*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/05/11/politics/trump-rally-new-jersey/index.html)

To be sure, Trump has a lot of fine, politically defensible choices. South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott has an inspirational life story and could help Trump continue to persuade African American men, who seem increasingly [*weary of Biden*](https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/12/us/politics/biden-black-democrats.html) and the Democratic Party. Scott [*is respected*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/05/22/politics/tim-scott-2024-presidential-campaign/index.html) by all corners of the GOP and is a gifted public speaker.

Sens. [*Marco Rubio*](https://www.cnn.com/videos/politics/2024/02/11/marco-rubio-trump-nato-russia-sotu-vpx.cnn) of Florida and [*J.D. Vance*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/05/12/politics/video/jd-vance-trump-post-jewish-biden-voters-should-be-ashamed-sotu-digvid) of Ohio are Trump's smoothest Senate surrogates, who effortlessly explain and defend the former president on national television.

Trump's former White House Press Secretary and current Arkansas Gov. [*Sarah Huckabee Sanders*](https://www.cnn.com/videos/tv/2016/03/16/sarah-huckabee-sanders-trump-2016-tapper-intv-lead.cnn) and New York Rep. [*Elise Stefanik*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/23/politics/elise-stefanik-trump/) have both ferociously defended Trump against Democratic attacks, of which there's sure to be an onslaught in the fall.

But in Burgum, Trump may see a version of himself - a successful businessman who tackled ***politics*** late in life to try to smash a broken system run by inept politicians who couldn't innovate their way out of a wet paper sack.

Opinion by Scott Jennings

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