

# [***Howard Kurtz And Guest Panel Tackle Handling Of The Hunter Biden Case; "Fox News Sunday" Host Shannon Bream Weighs In On Trump's Appeal On Presidential Immunity; Howard Kurtz And Guest Panel Discuss The Case Against Fani Willis; Fox Poll Gives Trump A Two-Point Lead Over Joe Biden; Senator Mitch McConnell Announces He Will Step Down In November***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BG6-T161-JCS1-63KT-00000-00&context=1516831)

Fox News MEDIA BUZZ 11:00 AM EST

March 3, 2024 Sunday

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**Length:** 7915 words

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**Guests:** Tomi Lahren, Philippe Reines, Shannon Bream; Susan Ferrechio, Richard Fowler

**Body**

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

HOWARD KURTZ, FOX HOST: It is a coalition of the galaxies when ***politics***, media, and the courts are drawn into an existential battle over the White House, the Hill, the Supremes, Donald Trump, Joe Biden, Hunter Biden, and, well, the American way of life. It's the ultimate drama for the mainstream media, which have practically created opposition camps in this presidential election year.

Looming over the landscape is the nation's highest court, which agreed to hear Trump's appeal on the crucial question of presidential immunity. Shannon Bream ahead on that. Many in the media see this as the right way to settle such a weighty question, while many others in the media are calling this a stalling tactic to delay the January 6th case past the election.

It's all been fast and furious. Illinois has become the third state to kick Trump off the ballot, and we're waiting for a Supreme Court ruling on that. And given the consensus that this is a very bad and undemocratic idea, I don't know why SCOTUS isn't moving faster. Oh, and we narrowly averted a government shutdown.

There's also the stunning news of Mitch McConnell stepping down as Republican leader. An embarrassing hearing for Georgia DA Fani Willis and Hunter Biden being grilled again behind closed congressional doors, not to mention the former President clobbering Nikki Haley in Michigan heading into Super Tuesday.

So, you can see why those of us in the news business are suffering from vertigo, staggering from one huge story to the next, just trying to keep up. I'm Howard Kurtz and this is Media Buzz.

Let's turn to the calamity at the southern border, which President Biden decided to visit on Thursday and Donald Trump decided to visit on Thursday, knowing full well the media would turn out in force. The former President went to the border in Eagle Pass, Texas, and the current President was 300 miles away in Brownsville with the pundits waging rhetorical war.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

DONALD TRUMP, FORMER U.S. PRESIDENT: This is a Joe Biden invasion. This is a Biden invasion over the past three years. Crooked Joe is the blood of countless innocent victims.

JOE BIDEN, U.S. PRESIDENT: So, here's what I would say to Mr. Trump. Instead of playing ***politics*** with this issue, instead of telling members of Congress to block this legislation, join me or I'll join you in telling the Congress to pass this bipartisan Border Security bill.

JESSE WATTERS, "THE JESSE WATTERS" PRIMETIME" HOST: Biden and Trump brought every news camera in the country to the border today. It's an optics war and Trump won. The voters have soured on Joe. There is no coming back.

JOY REID, "THE READOUT" What you see is Republicans and specifically Donald Trump being more trusted on the border, even though he's literally saying they want to build camps, they want to bring back, quote, unquote, "Operation Went Back", they want to do mass deportation.

LAURA INGRAHAM, "THE INGRAHAM ANGLE": The press is not worried that too many illegals are coming to the United States, among them criminals. The press is worried that tough policies could stop more from coming.

LAWRENCE O'DONNELL, "THE LAST WORD" HOST: Donald Trump says people are going to die because the southern border isn't secure, and he wants them to continue to die every single day, that he is not President.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

KURTZ: Joining us now to analyze the coverage in Nashville, Tomi Lahren, host of the Outkicks show, Tomi Lahren is fearless. And with me, Philippe Reines, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State in the Obama administration.

Tomi, Donald Trump, Joe Biden, both went to the border to score political points. Trump's message was that it's an illegal evasion and Biden has blood on his hands. Biden's message was Trump should work with him to pass the tough bipartisan Border Bill. Which message broke through the media static?

TOMI LAHREN, HOST OF OUTKICK'S "TOMI LAHREN IS FEARLESS: I think it's also important to note that the only reason that there was that media presence at both points on that U.S.-Mexico border was because Donald Trump went. You know, we know that President Joe said that he was unaware that Donald Trump was planning a trip. I think we all can surmise that probably wasn't true.

So, the only reason the media was there and they had to be there with both President Joe and President Trump is because Donald Trump said he's going to go to that southern border. But optically, I think it speaks for itself.

When you see former President Trump standing there, flanked by the Border Patrol Union, flanked by Texas Governor Greg Abbott, that has done the most to protect the border, I think it's quite obvious, optically, which one of these men truly has a desire to secure the border --

KURTZ: Right.

LAHREN: - which man has already done it, and which man was standing there for a photo op. And I think it's also obvious when you've got Joe standing inside reading off a teleprompter, optically and media-wise, it just looked much better for the former President.

KURTZ: Well, Trump was reading from notes. And, Philippe, look. Biden's offering to compromise. But that's kind of a dirty word for MAGA Republicans So, does the President making that offer to work together with Trump help him even if the media are portraying him as being the reasonable guy?

PHILIPPE REINES, FORMER HILLARY CLINTON ADVISER: Well, to start, I think I disagree with Tomi because, you know, generally we see immigration, we just see Donald Trump across the screen. Here, irrespective of who was reading notes or who was using teleprompter, who brought the press, it was split screen.

So, right off the bat, Joe Biden ate into 50 percent of Donald Trump's coverage. What I would say though, is it's great they were both there because we're here now talking about immigration and how they both have to be in it. It's one of the leading issues of 2024 and they both need to do it.

I mean, from my perspective, there should have been two more presidents there. There should have been George Bush and Barack Obama because over the last 24 years, 12 of Republican, 12 of Democrats, this is still a mess. Donald Trump didn't break it. Joe Biden didn't break it.

KURTZ: It's an absolute mess. And Tomi, illegal immigration, I would say now, is the number one or number two issue, depending on your ***politics*** in the campaign. Obviously, a democratic liability. Nobody can dispute that. But big city mayors also unhappy with Joe Biden as some of these migrants have been shipped to their areas. Why did it take so long for most of the media, Fox accepted, to cover this as the full blown crisis it is?

LAHREN: Well, the media, in order for them to see what's going on, they have to be there. And it's easier, much easier, to ignore it altogether. And they were able to, for the first two and a half years, maybe even three years, able to really ignore it.

We'd see these surges, these caravans. The media said it wasn't a crisis because the administration said it wasn't a crisis, so they followed suit. But when you start seeing these busloads, when you start seeing them being dropped off in New York City, in Chicago, and you start seeing these blue city, sanctuary city mayors crying foul, the media had to jump in, they had to cover it, they had to admit it was a crisis.

Now it's just a he said, she said, who's to blame. But I think the American people know that this was not a crisis under Donald Trump and they see that it's a crisis now. So it's unavoidable. They're going to have to cover this. It is going to be, I believe, the number one issue --

KURTZ: Okay.

LAHREN: -- maybe behind the economy, but it also impacts the economy.

KURTZ: Right.

LAHREN: So, I do believe number one issue, media's got to cover.

KURTZ: Well, Trump's approach to border security, obviously, was very controversial at the time. And Philippe, this is a question most of the media won't ask. Didn't Joe Biden miss an opportunity, I would say, to do something dramatic? Why would he and his people leak to the press that he's considering a border crackdown through executive orders, then go to the border and do nothing concrete?

REINES: Well, I would take a step back. One thing we haven't talked about is that one of the most important pieces of legislation that could have combated what's going on at the border was scuttled by House Republicans, not by Joe Biden, not by Senate Democrats.

Right now, had Republican intra-party ***politics*** not taken over, including Donald Trump supposedly, wanting to keep the issue, because you're right, the poll numbers are horrific for the President. And people want to keep that as is. You know, they don't want to fix it.

But right now, we could be talking about how there was bipartisan legislation to make things better, and you have to ask why. And the President's turning to executive orders because he's not getting anything from the House of Representatives controlled by the Republicans.

KURTZ: Fine and I understand Trump's role and the Republicans' role, but at the same time, he could have used the powers that he had, you know, let other people complain about it. And I just thought -- I thought it was a missed opportunity. Tomi, do you think the media are rooting for the bipartisan Border Bill that went down in flames, in part because it contains desperately needed aid to Ukraine?

LAHREN: Well, of course, there's been this fixation on money to Ukraine. And you know, the media and those in the beltway, they can talk about that until they're blue in the face. But you know, I live here in Nashville, Tennessee. I don't live in New York. I don't live in D.C. I don't live in California anymore, thank goodness.

So, I can tell you that average folks in the middle of this country, in the southern parts of this country, when we're looking at an invasion at our southern border, when we hear our politicians and the media talk about Ukraine aid until they are blue in the face, it really irritates us.

It really irritates us that that is at the tip of their tongue, and they're trying to tie it to protecting our border as if they have to go hand in hand. They do not protect our border first. Average Americans are going to be calling for this. The media has not picked up on that. But if they're wise, they will.

KURTZ: But you obviously understand that whether, whatever you want to say first, second, third, Ukraine was the subject to a brutal invasion by Russia. Many civilians have been killed and now, I think you Ukraine aid might pass but they can't get a vote. So, you're saying -- I understand protect the border first. But are you saying average Americans don't care about Ukraine?

LAHREN: I'm not saying they don't care about Ukraine. Certainly, we have empathy for the people in Ukraine and their plight and their struggle. Nobody wants to see what's happening happen. No one wants to see what's happening right now in Gaza happen either.

But when you look at it from the perspective of the average American who's struggling right now to afford groceries, their mortgage, gas prices, when you've got, you know, CEOs of cereal companies saying, eat cereal because you probably can't afford your other dinner, I think Americans have a hard time swallowing, we need to keep sending money to Ukraine in perpetuity, we don't see an end to this.

And until we can get our home front figured out, I got to tell you, I don't think the average American really cries a lot of tears for Ukraine when they're busy crying their own tears over their own economy and their own invasion.

KURTZ: Well, Philippe, you worked at the State Department, of course, Ukraine is losing ground as we speak, to the Russians. Can one man speaker Mike Johnson really keep this off the floor?

REINES: Apparently, the speakership under Republican Party has just not the way used to be in terms of people getting out what they want. But you know, it's funny --

KURTZ: Not the way it used to be when Kevin McCarthy was the Speaker.

REINES: Or, you know, Speaker Patrick -- that name was so long ago. We outdate ourselves. KURTZ: Yeah.

REINES: I saw someone recently say that if Rocky Four had come out this year, the Republicans would be voting for Ivan Drago. You made the point, you know, Ukraine, the way we're helping, is the cheapest money we could spend to show Russia what's what. They are still our adversary. I don't know when that changed. I don't know why that changed among the Republican Party.

But it's important. And it's not either or. You know, we can walk and chew gum and fund Ukraine. That does not excuse scuttling the Immigration Bill for political reasons. And that's what happened, period. There's nothing more to it. And Mike Johnson can't prevent it. It's a free-for-all there.

KURTZ: Let me play a clip of CNN cutting away from the tail end of Donald Trump's remarks at the border and Anchor Kaitlan Collins saying this.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

KAITLAN COLLINS, CNN ANCHOR: In just those brief remarks there, he made several lies. He told several lies about the border, also misrepresented his own past on the border.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

KURTZ: All right, twenty second answer from each of you. Tomi, you have a problem with how CNN handled it.

LAHREN: Of course, they don't want to allow the former President to speak because when he's able to speak and address the audience of CNN, that makes them very uncomfortable because that audience just might see and hear something they're not used to and they just might agree with it. He might win some hearts and minds.

I also looked at some of the fact-checking that they did supposedly --

KURTZ: Yeah.

LAHREN: -- and it's laughable at best.

KURTZ: Well, CNN did carry most of it. MSNBC didn't carry Biden or Trump because they were so enamored of the Trump Supreme Court appeal story. Philippe, your take.

REINES: Well, let's make this clear. The reason that the networks have to do this, they should do more of it is because trump is making it necessary. He is abusing live TV to tell lies. Now, you know, what if i lie to you right now, maybe I made a mistake, maybe not.

KURTZ: Yeah.

REINES: If I come back on next week and I say the same thing, you shouldn't have me on a third week because I should have known that.

KURTZ: Let me write this down, okay. Don't have Philippe on.

REINES: And, you know, what Trump did for the first term is that he ran roughshod over the networks. They never used the word lie. They were too afraid to do it.

KURTZ: Yeah.

REINES: And one of the lessons from that first term was call it out. And he makes it impossible to not do that.

KURTZ: All right.

REINES: If CNN didn't want to give an audience, they wouldn't have cut to it.

KURTZ: We could debate that for the rest of the show, but let me get a break. When we come back, the media's take on the latest closed-door deposition of Hunter Biden before the whole spectacle goes public.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

KURTZ: The television cameras and reporters were kept outside as a House Committee conducted a second closed door deposition with Hunter Biden.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

PAULA REID, CNN CHIEF LEGAL AFFAIRS CORRESPONDENT: It appears so far that Hunter Biden is holding his own. He is answering questions. He has not, were told, invoked the Fifth Amendment.

GREG GUTFELD, "THE FIVE" CO-HOST: There is concrete proof through emails that Joe is using Hunter Biden to make it rain. But the media says there's nothing to see here. It's political. This is from the most politically driven media in the history.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

KURTZ: Hunter Biden saying in his deposition, "My father was not sitting next to me. My father had no awareness of the business that I was doing. I take full responsibility for being an absolute ass and idiot when I sent that message. If I did send this message, I was drunk and probably high." But the President's son ignored the media's questions as he left the hearing.

Tomi, let's start with the transcript. Hunter blamed the addiction for an incriminating text that he says was sent to a different Chinese person with a similar name to that of a Chinese energy executive. He said if we put it up on the screen, oh, I've already read that, but let me just make the point. He's talked a lot about his addiction, his former addiction, and how do you think that comes across as a story and how average people react to it?

LAHREN: Listen, the media has been coddling this since the early days of the whole Hunter Biden saga. So, unfortunately, it's working. Unfortunately for Republicans that have been working very hard to get this across the finish line and have so much evidence piled on piled on piled on evidence. But unfortunately, the way the media has been able to frame this is that Joe Biden is just a great father, he loves his son, his sons struggle with addiction issues.

And we saw that with his testimony because every time that Hunter Biden was asked a pointed question, he was able to get out of it by saying, well, my addiction, maybe I was drunk, maybe I was high. Now, we don't want to poke fun at anybody --

KURTZ: Yeah.

LAHREN: -- with addiction issues. But this has been very easy for him to get out of simply by using that as an excuse.

KURTZ: Okay.

LAHREN: And I expect to continue -- the media is eating it up.

KURTZ: Okay. Philippe, the media are also covering the criminal indictment of Hunter Biden. My question to you is, do journalists and pundits have sympathy for Hunter Biden at this point?

REINES: I don't think so. I mean, I read everything across the board, and it's not like there's a dearth of coverage on Hunter Biden. I think because his name is Biden, that supersedes anything else with any media outlet and their interest. But the setting of that tells you everything. The Republicans wanted him behind closed doors because they don't want anyone to see Matt Gaetz saying crazy things like, were you on cocaine as you wrote this?

KURTZ: But then, they didn't --

REINES: Hunter Biden wanted to be in public. But Hunter Biden wanted a public hearing.

KURTZ: And now he's going to get it.

REINES: Hopefully. We'll see.

KURTZ: As Jim Comer, Oversight Chairman --

REINES: We'll see but they refuse now. And the reason for that is because they don't want -- Republicans don't want for us, the voters, to turn on our television and to see the dynamic of beating up on the President's son. It's not going to look good. And that's different from looking into it.

KURTZ: Right. Well, Tomi, both sides have been spinning this, obviously. And if this other televised hearing comes about, I can just imagine the ratings. But Jim Comer says the deposition was successful. They were able to prove several bits of our evidence, that's a quote from the Congressman. The question the mainstream media keep asking is, where's the proof that Joe Biden got a dime?

LAHREN: Yeah, and that's going to be the difficult part for Republicans. And I got to say, as somebody who does believe there's plenty of evidence here, I think that this has failed optically for Republicans, and they've done good work. Obviously, Jim Jordan Comer have done great work on this.

But optically, it does make it seem as though they're beating up on someone with addiction issues. That's exactly what the media wanted it to look like. That's how they framed it, and unfortunately, that's what's coming to fruition.

So, I would encourage Republicans, I know you want to get to the bottom of this, but let's focus on the election. Let's focus on the failed policies of Joe Biden. This impeachment inquiry, unfortunately, is falling flat with a lot of viewers and voters.

REINES: Tomi and I found common ground, failed out things.

KURTZ: You're going to endorse everything she says -- failed out things. Okay, so what Comer said after the news broke that the star witness, the former FBI informant that the Committee was relying on, told that he was reliable, had been indicted for lying about his Biden family corruption allegations. What Comer said was he might not even ask the House to vote on impeachment, wants to wind this up. Is this a sign that this balloon is deflating?

REINES: Absolutely. The balloon was pretty empty to begin with because as you said it's relying on a witness that has been discredited, arrested, the whole nine yards. I think the Republicans are working backwards from assuming guilt, wanting guilt, the same way they did with Hillary Clinton and Benghazi. These hearings and these investigations are not on the up and up. They work backwards from guilt.

And what they're doing with Hunter is they're just not finding it. They're finding a person that's had a terrible you know, couple of decades and a person who's had personal things that have bothered him, that have taken him down, that must tear his parents apart to no end.

But that's not what Congress does. Congress has looked into something, they're not finding it, but they won't let it go. And Mike Johnson, back to the earlier point, is not equipped and he's not authorized to let it go because you have people in that caucus that are not going to stop. The Republican conference are going to keep going until they find someone that says something that lets them beat it to death.

KURTZ: Well, impeachment or not, there is still the Hunter Biden criminal case, so he will continue to be in the news. Good discussion. Tomi Lahren, Philippe Reines, thanks so much. Up next, Shannon Bream on the Supreme Court sparking a fierce media debate by taking Donald Trump's appeal on presidential immunity.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

KURTZ: When the Supreme Court agreed to hear Donald Trump's appeal on presidential immunity, it was like a media explosion. The stakes are sky high with the court's agreement to hear the case and not scheduling oral arguments until April, slowing down the January 6th trial.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP) JESSE WATTERS, "JESSE WATTERS PRIMETIME" HOST: Now, if Trump receives a favorable ruling on immunity from the Supreme Court, Jack Smith's January 6th case likely goes up in flames.

RACHEL MADDOW, "THE RACHEL MADDOW SHOW" HOST: This is B.S. You are doing this as a dilatory tactic to help your political friend, your partisan patron. And for you to say that this is something that the court needs to decide because it's something that's unclear in the law, is just flagrant, flagrant bullpucky.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

KURTZ: I spoke with Shannon Bream, the host of "Fox News Sunday", a short time ago.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

KURTZ: Shannon Bream, bring welcome.

SHANNON BREAM, "FOX NEWS SUNDAY" ANCHOR: It is great to be with you, Howie.

KURTZ: Same here. The Supreme Court may be on solid ground in taking Donald Trump's immunity claim, but the media are saying that by scheduling the oral arguments in late April, they are slowing down the January 6th trial. Fair point?

BREAM: It is slowing it down a bit, but the fact is this is rocket docket speed for the Supreme Court. Normally, it takes you years to get there. So, while it may feel like a delay to some, and it is technically a delay to that lower court case, this is very speedy by Supreme Court standards.

KURTZ: Although, I looked it up and in the 2000 election, which the Supreme Court essentially decided, Bush v. Gore took five days from ruling to, from, excuse me, from the filing to the ruling. Media liberals go further, as you know, they say that the least five conservative justices are aiding and abetting Donald Trump, trying to ensure that no federal trial will be finished before the election, obvious implication is if the foreign President wins back his old job, he or his A.G. will just shut the whole thing down. Going a little far in terms of assigning political motivation?

BREAM: Well, the fact is, to get to this cert granted, meaning taking up the President's case -- the former President's case, that only takes four votes. And we don't get a read out on the votes. There was nothing in the order that came from the court. So, we don't know who at least four of those people were.

The fact is, this Jack Smith trial was supposed to start on Monday, March 4th. It was supposed to happen. There have been delays all along. But for a federal criminal trial, that would have been pretty speedy. There are always going to be pre-trial motions and discovery and things that slow it down.

So, what Jack Smith has argued is this is a matter of national importance. We want voters to know what they're getting before they go to the polls. On the other side, you have people saying there are millions of pages in discovery. Why speed up this trial? Because to speed it up would also potentially appear political.

KURTZ: Yeah, so either way, you're going to get a lot of criticism.

BREAM: You are. It's kind of a Rorschach test.

KURTZ: Yes.

BREAM: Like, depending on where you are is how you view this case.

KURTZ: Right. And Special Counsel Jack Smith, knowing that his January 6th trial is already being delayed, for how long we don't know, he's also handling the classified documents case. It's expected to take about six weeks. He wants to start in July. Trump says August. Is this a little like college basketball before the shot clock, where one team wants to do the hurry up offense and the other is sort of slow walking everything?

BREAM: Well, and the funny thing is, the idea of a speedy trial in our legal system is generally to the benefit of the defendant. If they don't want to sit around, they have the right to push and say, come on, my justice is being delayed. It's not that it goes to the prosecutorial side, which is how it feels in this case. There's no denying there is a national election coming.

I mean, that's definitely part of the conversation, but courts don't want to be driven by outside exigencies if they don't have to. They worry about that looking political. This is really tough for the Supreme Court, where I think the last thing they want to do is look like they're putting a weight on the scale. But Jack Smith himself argued back in December. They were the only court who could decide this immunity question.

KURTZ: Yeah and an Illinois judge the other day knocking Donald Trump off the ballot when the Supreme Court is weighing that very question -- do states have the authority to do that -- sounds to me a little bit like grandstanding because he's going to have to go along with whatever the court decides. And we already know from oral arguments that they're likely to restore Trump to the ballot.

BREAM: Yeah and we're waiting on that. That could come at any moment. You have two states in Super Tuesday who have said we don't think you should be on the ballot. Well, their voters are going to go to the polls.

KURTZ: Yeah.

BREAM: And wonder whether their votes are going to count. So, I think the court will get us to that pretty quickly. But this judge in Illinois who made that decision, she basically was overturning what a bipartisan commission had decided, which was he could stay on the ballot. So, the minute she does that, there will be detractors who say that's also political.

And it's a question folks are asking.

KURTZ: Well, we have just a few seconds, but I know that justices like to hone their opinions and their dissents and their concurring opinions. Couldn't they write a little quicker? I mean, the whole country's waiting here.

BREAM: The whole country is waiting. And on this Colorado decision, especially with those folks heading in on Super Tuesday --

KURTZ: Yeah.

BREAM: -- I'm a little surprised we don't have it yet. They had arguments February 8th, but I think definitely sooner than, rather than later for that one. It's not going to be an end of the term June decision that they drop on us.

KIURTZ: Shannon Bream, thanks very much for letting us on your set.

BREAM: Thank you. Good to see you.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

KURTZ: Next on "Media Buzz", the key witness against Georgia D.A. Fani Willis says she was already sleeping with her boyfriend when she gave him the job, but is grilled on the stand.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

KURTZ: It was a dramatic showdown for Fani Willis, the Fulton County D.A. investigating Donald Trump, pressed on whether she lied about when she began her romantic relationship with Nathan Wade, the lawyer she hired as Chief Prosecutor. Her top accuser, Terrence Bradley, Wade's former law partner and divorce lawyer, cited by a Trump co-defendant that the couple was dating all along. But Bradley ran into a tough cross-examination.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

TERRENCE BRADLEY, NATHAN WADE'S FORMER LAW PARTNER: No, I have no direct knowledge of when the relationship started. It was -- I was speculating. I didn't have a, no one told me I was speculating.

UNKNOWN: No one told you that?

BRADLEY: No one told me that.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

KURTZ: Joining us now in Florida, Susan Ferrechio, a -- excuse me, a "Washington Times" National ***Politics*** Correspondent. And here with me on this set, Richard Fowler, a Fox News contributor and talk show host.

Susan, what's the bottom line on this hearing, which the cable news networks took again live because it's so addictive, in which that key witness tried to prove that Fani Willis and her then-boyfriend committed perjury about the start of their intimate relationship?

SUSAN FERRECHIO, WASHINGTON TIMES NATIONAL ***POLITICS*** CORRESPONDENT: Well, his text messages are different than the way he testified. His text messages were more definitive when he spoke to one of the defense lawyers in the case earlier, saying that he knew that they were having a relationship prior to his hiring. And when he got on the stand, he then said he couldn't remember and he wasn't really exactly sure.

So, you have the text messages that he sent definitively versus what he said later on the stand. I think the most interesting thing about this, Howie, is that, as you just said, it was addictive and it was aired live on television by many of the cable networks. It gave the public an opportunity to see it for themselves and to decide whether they think Fani Willis belongs on the case. So, the judge will make a decision --

KURTZ: Right.

FERRECHIO: -- but the public also got an interesting look --

KURTZ: Yeah.

FERRECHIO: -- at the case that they normally wouldn't get. I think that was really important.

KURTZ: Yeah, I think everybody will agree that it was addictive. But the media consensus is that the D.A.'s lawyer destroyed the credibility of Terrence Bradley when he was reduced to saying, well, I didn't have direct knowledge, I was speculating, that's not the same thing as hard evidence.

RICHARD FOWLER, "THE RICHARD FOWLER" SHOW HOST: But look, I think going into this, the whole idea for all the defendants in this case was Terry -- this Terry character was supposed to be their star witness. And what ended up happening is he fell apart on stage. But I think we have to zoom out just a minute here and go back to testimony that Fani Willis gave about a week or so ago where she said, this is not necessarily about me. This is about the folks who tried to defraud the 2020 election.

And I think that is the part here that I think is the most critical. When she says that she is correct, whether you agree that they're guilty or innocent, the fact is these folks had another slate of electors. They have evidence of them walking into vote tallies and all sorts of things.

KURTZ: Right.

FOWLER: And the problem now what they've done in a great in a very, almost I would say, in a fantastic way, right? The defense is they've muddied the waters and they made this about Fani Willis. They made this about her alleged affair with the Chief -- the Chief Prosecutor that she hired instead of the fact that on the January 2020 election --

KURTZ: Yeah --

FOWLER: -- were folks who were trying to defraud the election.

KURTZ: But of course -

FOWLER: And that was problematic.

KURTZ: But of course, it's about her and it's not an alleged affair which has to do with the timing. By the way, Donald Trump posting an all-caps slam against Fani Willis' "sexcapades", that's the word the former President used. Even many media liberals, Susan, are saying, what was Willis thinking?

Even if you think she should stay in the job and so forth, how could she put in jeopardy such an important prosecution by, at a minimum, supervising as the Chief Prosecutor, her boyfriend at the time, who was paid hundreds of thousands of dollars by the state?

FERRECHIO: And he was a divorce lawyer. He wasn't even someone who was necessarily qualified to take on this prosecution.

KURTZ: Right.

FERRECHIO: I think one of the things the judge said on Friday during that trial, the final closing arguments was really important. One of the defense lawyers rather said to the judge, what is the public going to think of this?

The perception of this case is very important and what was going on with Fani Willis and her hiring of this prosecutor is as important as whether or not she violated ethics rules, which is another big issue. It's not like let's just make this about Fani Willis. There are rules that she appears to have violated in hiring Nathan Wade from the get-go that jeopardized legitimacy of the case.

Let's go back to some polling where people are saying two-thirds of Americans in some of these cases say that these prosecutions against the President are political. It's really important that the public has confidence in our legal system --

KURTZ: Yeah.

FERRECHIO: -- and in our elections. And talking about whether this is election interference, trying to put Trump on trial, and put him in jail so that he can't run for President. It's all important. That's why the legitimacy of this case and the way it was conducted by Fanny Willis is extremely important.

KURTZ: Well, I have another question for you after this, Richard, but just briefly, if Fani Willis is thrown off the case, if that's the judge's decision, this could be the end of the RICO prosecution.

FOWLER: It could be, but let's remember what the RICO prosecution's already born -- what fruit have already been born here, right? There's been a number of individuals, folks who have been on this air, folks who have been in other places, who have already taken plea bargains, right? People have already pled guilty to engaging in prominent Trump lawyers.

Prominent Trump lawyers have pled guilty to engaging in electoral fraud and violation of Georgia law. Whether or not they get to the President is another story, but to say that this case is hogwash is ridiculous when folks have already pled guilty because they know they committed a crime.

KURTZ: That is a fair point and meanwhile, I want to turn now to some remarks that the former President Trump made speaking to an audience of black conservatives about his connection with that particular audience.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

DONALD TRUMP, FORMER U.S. PRESIDENT: And a lot of people said that that's why the black people like me because they have been hurt so badly and discriminated against. And they actually viewed me as I'm being discriminated against. It's been pretty amazing.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

KURTZ: Richard Trump has taken a lot of media flack for saying that and some related remarks. Fair or unfair?

FOWLER: I think that's definitely fair. Look, where the President is right is that there is discrimination in our legal system. There's no question about it. Black women are prosecuted more than anybody else. We've seen the sentencing disparity between crack cocaine and regular cocaine. We can go on and on and talk about the problems of the justice system.

But let's be very clear. Donald Trump is not the poster child for what's wrong with the justice system. An average black man in this country is a poster child for what's wrong with the justice system. And if the former President really wanted to do something about it, he would pass more laws and run a campaign to fix it instead of saying, this is how I'm going to get black votes. This and sneakers aren't going to do it.

KURTZ: All right, let me get Susan in on this last question.

FERRECHIO: Oh, well, Trump is definitely doing well with minorities and he's doing so well, it's scaring the heck out of the Biden campaign. He's doing particularly well in some of these swing states where minority vote is going to be critical for whether Biden can hang on. Georgia, for example, where his approval rating -- for Biden's approval rating has plummeted tens of points. And now he's on the verge of losing the state to Trump in 2024. So it's a huge issue and it has a lot to do with --

KURTZ: Right.

FERRECHIO: -- the economy and other things that the minorities feel the Biden administration is not doing enough for them on those issues.

KURTZ: Well, let me just point out at a Fox poll out today, 28 percent of blacks say they're going to vote for Donald Trump versus four percent at this time in 2020.

FERRECHIO: That's huge.

KURTZ: Okay, let me get a -- turn to something else now. Former Fox News Correspondent Catherine Herridge has been held in contempt and ordered to pay $800 a day until she reveals a confidential source involving a probe of Chinese-American Scientist Yanping Chen, who filed a civil suit after not being charged.

The move against Herridge, recently laid off by CBS, is a terrible idea that should be killed on appeal. There's a reason such civil orders are rarely opposed unless there's an issue of overriding national importance.

A Fox statement said that holding a journalist in contempt for protecting confidential source has a deeply chilling effect on journalism. Fox News media remains committed to protecting the rights of a free press and freedom of speech and believes this decision should be appealed. After the break, we're heading into Super Tuesday, just two days after Donald Trump buried Nikki Haley in yet another state.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

KURTZ: We're two days away from Super Tuesday, the last in the last contest in Michigan, didn't go so well for Nikki Haley.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

UNKNOWN: This is Donald Trump's Republican Party. And nobody can duplicate that, not even Nikki Haley.

SEAN HANNITY, "HANNITY" HOST: They're, quote, freaking out that Biden is bleeding support from Arab American voters in Michigan.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

KURTZ: Susan, let's start with the Republicans. When Donald Trump beat Nikki Haley in Michigan 68 to 26 percent and he has 247 delegates to her 24, the obvious media question which reporters have asked her again and again is why is Nikki Haley still in this race?

FERRECHIO: Well, especially because in the upcoming week or so, Trump is poised to pick up enough of the delegates to actually become the nominee. So, what will she do after that? You know, she's talked about sticking it out through Super Tuesday.

No one's quite sure what will happen after that. Does she want to remain out there as a possible third party candidate on no labels, the group that is trying to get on the ballot in many states?

Or is she trying to prop up her political career for another run in 2028? Or does she just want to remain out there to show that there are at least, you know, 30 percent of voters who want to vote for somebody else, which is troubling for President Biden heading into the general election? So nobody's quite sure what her reasoning is.

KURTZ: Right.

FERRECHIO: She certainly has the money to stay in for now. But after Super Tuesday, I think people are really going to start asking her, what exactly is your game plan specifically? Because she hasn't really laid it out at this point.

KURTZ: Yeah, well, she may not fully know. Richard, we can debate the tactics that Nikki Haley go too easy on Donald Trump for too long. And then she tells "The Wall Street Journal" another Trump administration would be like a suicide. But as with Ron DeSantis and others, maybe the only thing that mattered was Trump's grip on the party?

FOWLER: Well, it's clear that Trump has a grip on the party, and it's clear that Trump is going to be the GOP nominee. But there's a point that Susan made that I think it's very important for us to recognize. In every one of these primary competitions, what we've seen is Nikki Haley get anywhere between 28 to about 40 percent of Republican voters.

This is problematic for a guy that this is supposed to be a coronation for him, and he's running as the quasi-Republican incumbent, former President Trump is. And that presents a huge problem for us as we get into this general election. Can he go back and get those 40 percent of Republicans to come on his side?

With that being said, if he's, the goal of this campaign is to try to woo African American voters and woo Latino voters to your side, what we're seeing from this President is no message, no rhetoric or no policy positions that woo these voters over at all. And once again, on top of that, he's dealing with the fact that 30 percent of his party is not with him right now.

KURTZ: And on the Democratic side, Susan, the press made a big deal out of uncommitted getting 13 percent in Michigan, supposed to Biden's 81 percent. Does a protest vote like that deserve more coverage?

FERRECHIO: I think it got some pretty decent coverage.

KURTZ: Yeah.

FERRECHIO: I know at least in our papers, we talked about it a lot. I think for Biden, I think his bigger problem in the general election is probably going to be the very third party candidates, Robert F. Kennedy Jr., others pulling away, some of those votes. But in Michigan, I didn't think that was such a big deal that there was that protest vote specifically over that.

KURTZ: Yeah.

FERRECHIO: One issue. His larger issue, I think, is just going to be, let's look at, back to what Richard was saying, look at the general election polls though at this point. Biden is losing to Trump in key swing states.

KURTZ: Right.

FERRECHIO: It does not look positive for him at this point.

KURTZ: I should mention.

FERRECHIO: Those swing states are so important.

KURTZ: This new Fox poll out today gives Trump a two-point lead over Joe Biden. That's within the margin of error. "New York Times" gives Trump a five-point lead. Richard, a lot of Democrats are unhappy with Biden, including on the Mideast war and the catastrophe in Gaza. So, what's wrong with them signaling their discontent?

FOWLER: I think they shouldn't.

KURTZ: Yeah.

FOWLER: I think what you've seen from the President after that signaling of discontent is you've seen some movement from the Biden administration and the Biden State Department to move Bibi Netanyahu and the Israelis closer to a peace deal. I think what has to be said about this is New York Times' Siena poll, which made up of the round of the media.

KURTZ: Shocked poll, said Drudge.

FOWLER: Yeah, but look, let's remember, this was the same poll that also said that there was going to be a red wave and we're still waiting for it to hit us and it hasn't yet --

KURTZ: Oh, the red wave.

FOWLER: -- in 2022.

KURTZ: It seems like so long ago. Susan Ferrecchio, Richard Fowler, thanks very much for joining us. Still to come, what the media say is behind the surprising news that Mitch McConnell is giving up his leadership post.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

MITCH MCCONNEL (R-KY) SENATE MINORITY LEADER: One of life's most underappreciated talents is to know when it's time to move on to life's next chapter.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

KURTZ: Senator Mitch McConnell stunning the media and the world by saying he'll step down in November from his long-time post as Republican leader. Joining us now, Mike Emanuel, Fox's Chief Washington Correspondent.

And Mike, when McConnell admitted that aid to Ukraine could not pass because Donald Trump and the Republicans had blown up a bipartisan border deal, and then he makes this striking announcement. Was he waving the white flag that this is now Donald Trump's Republican Party?

MIKE EMANUEL, FOX NEWS CHIEF WASHINGTON CORRESPONDENT: I think there's some of that for sure. I think he realizes that there are a number of people who are more Trump-inspired Republicans, whereas he's more of a Reagan-inspired Republican. And so he's heard some criticism from some of his own rank-and-file senators, which he's not used to hearing.

And so, I think he's 82 years old. He's had some health issues. There have been some concerns and so, he's had a long run. And his legacy I think is solid and so I think he decided perhaps it was time to have some -- a new voice, a new face leading the conference forward in the new Congress.

KURTZ: Any chance that he did some math and thought he might not have the votes to get re-elected to the post?

EMANUEL: Quite possibly.

KURTZ: Yeah.

EMANUEL: But I you know I think he's been in power a long time. I think he knows that he's done a lot of what he wants to do. Look at the 6-3 majority on the Supreme Court.

KURTZ: Yeah.

EMANUEL: Conservative majority. I've talked to some liberals in recent days who say, you know, they didn't agree with anything that Mitch McConnell did, but they respected the way he used his power and got things done for his conference and for Republican presidents.

KURTZ: When there was a meeting at the White House to talk about avoiding a government shutdown, as well as military aid to Ukraine and the border, Chuck Schumer and Hakeem Jeffries there for the Dems, Mike Johnson there for the Republicans, Mitch McConnell wasn't at that meeting. Was that a telltale sign, do you think?

EMANUEL: I think they knew that they needed to get Mike Johnson on board with something. And so, the bottom line is McConnell could be a yes and they could pass the Senate, but if it can't pass the House, then you've got a big problem. And so, I think it was a big emphasis to bring in. Speaker Johnson and try to get him on board with doing something to move things forward.

KURTZ: Right. McConnell, an outspoken advocate of aid to Ukraine which is controversial with the Republican Party. Look, McConnell accomplished a lot for the conservative cause fighting hard for Republicans and at the same time, you know, doing deals with Biden and other Democrats. He was somebody could work, of course, you know.

But media liberals and left- wingers will never forgive him for refusing to give Merrick Garland or Barack Obama's nominee in the Supreme Court, even adhering, and then 11 months -- that was 11 months before the election, and then just weeks before the election, McConnell pushed through Amy Coney Barrett for that seat, another Trump nominee.

EMANUEL: Yeah, I was looking back at it. Amy Coney Barrett was nominated on September 26, 2020. She was confirmed October 26, 2020, before a November 3rd election. And bottom line, a lot of conventional wisdom in Washington was, well, wait till after the election Mitch McConnell said he had the power, he was going to get it done. He got her through and that makes it a six-three conservative majority as opposed to five-four.

KURTZ: Right. So, as I say, he cemented his conservative credentials, but he also became an object of a lot of, well, I was going to say derision, but it doesn't matter because he was respected. Except in that instance, I think he was seen as going outside the rules or making his own rules.

But he's been majority leader so long that minority leader and majority leader that it's hard to imagine someone else that job. But we have the three Johns competing. Mike Emanuel, always good to see you.

EMANUEL: Thank you, Howie.

KURTZ: That's it for this edition of "Media Buzz". I'm Howard Kurtz. Hey, you can subscribe to my daily podcast, "Media Buzzmeter". We've had millions of downloads as I riff on today's top five stories. And now, iTunes is a good place to do it. Now, you've heard me say this before, but we will be back here next Sunday at 11 Eastern with what remains the only media analysis show on national television.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

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