

# [***Howard Kurtz And Panel Weigh In On Political Issues Including Special Counsel Hur's Report, D.A. Willis' Misconduct Trial And Biden Family Allegations; "Media Buzz" Tackles D.A. Willis' Misconduct Issue, Foreign Threat To National Security And Kansas City Shooting***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BC7-MYM1-JCS1-6053-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Byline:** Howard Kurtz, Jacqui Heinrich, Ben Domenech

**Guests:** Sarah Bedford, Laura Fink

**Body**

HOWARD KURTZ, FOX HOST: It's pretty obvious that President Biden doesn't like going on television, that his inner circle shields him from the press. But suddenly, Biden was attacking Donald Trump in a televised speech from the White House.

And here's one reason. The President wanted to change the subject from his memory issues in the wake of that stinging special counsel's report saying he has difficulty remembering things.

Also, Biden finally seems to be taking the advice of those who say he has to prove his competence by going on the air, rather than trotting out aides who say how sharp he is in private.

Trump gave his opponent an opening with these South Carolina rally remarks, recounting what he told a NATO leader about the failure to spend what's required on defense if Russia attacked.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

DONALD TRUMP, FORMER U.S. PRESIDENT: I said, you didn't pay? You're delinquent He said, yes, let's say that happened. No, I would not protect you. In fact, I would encourage them to do whatever the hell they want.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

KURTZ: And that prompted this Biden address.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

JOE BIDEN, U.S. PRESIDENT: No other President in our history has ever bowed down to a Russian dictator. Let me say this as clearly as I can. I never will. For God's sake, it's dumb. It's shameful. It's dangerous. It's un- American.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

KURTZ: To which Trump posted, could somebody please inform our uninformable President that NATO has to pay their bills? They are right now paying a small fraction of what we are for the disaster in Ukraine.

The world got a stark and tragic reminder of Vladimir Putin's murderous tactics in his invasion of Ukraine, with the death in an Arctic prison camp of opposition leader Alexei Navalny, with much of the media and Western leaders blaming Putin for the courageous dissident's demise.

Meanwhile, the press also reporting that Biden's lawyers unsuccessfully pushed the Justice Department to remove from Special Counsel Robert Hur's report the findings about memory issues, bringing the President back to the very subject he wants to leave behind.

I'm Howard Kurtz, and this is "Media Buzz". Ahead of a riveting televised hearing on whether Georgia D.A. Fani Willis should be removed from the Trump trial for hiring her boyfriend as the top prosecutor, and when the romantic relationship began.

As the pundits square off, the arguments range from whether Trump is damaging the Atlantic alliance and the media should call him out, to those saying former President is just looking for leverage and doesn't really mean it.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

UNKNOWN: This is Trump trying to do shock therapy on our NATO allies because they've been freeloading off the United States for decades.

JOE SCARBOROUGH, "MORNING JOE" CO-HOST: You have these unpatriotic Republicans who are voting against Ukraine and voting against Israel because Donald Trump has told them to do that because they know he's against Ukraine and Israel.

SEAN HANNITY, "HANNITY" HOST: If you believe that securing our borders is far more important right now for our national security interests, if you believe that should be funded first, what, that makes you a Putin puppet? Is that the new definition? Because that's bull.

Loose talk about possibly not backing our NATO allies in the event of an attack from an enemy, particularly including Russia, is not helpful.

JOY REID, "THE REIDOUT": What Trump did was invite a third world war in Europe by cheering on more aggression by Russia.

GREG GUTFELD, "GUTFELD" HOST: When Trump says America should get paid, the media hears Russia should invade. The media might have found their new Russia hoax just in time for the next election.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

KURTZ: Joining us now to analyze the coverage, Ben Domenech, Editor-at- Large at "The Spectator" and a Fox News Contributor. And in San Diego, Laura Fink, CEO of Rebelle Communications.

Ben, the media are making the case that Donald Trump is threatening global instability by making these comments about NATO and Russia. Are they overreacting to this story?

BEN DOMENECH, FOX NEWS CONTRIBUTOR: I think they are overreacting in part because we've heard this type of thing from him before when he was President. And I think he had a good point then and that he has a pretty good point now.

Though what we have seen is in response to what we've seen in Ukraine, a lot of these nations have stepped up the amount of money that they are spending. There's still many of them that are spending far less as a portion of their GDP than they ought to and they need to stand up because of the obvious security concerns involved.

But the idea that NATO is supposed to be something where all of these nations can just turn to the United States in any kind of instance and just assume that we're going to be footing the bill on everything is completely baseless and it's not irresponsible to ask them to pay their fair share.

KURTZ: Laura, isn't some of this story, though, also driven by on-the- record comments by top European officials who are worried that they might need to defend themselves in a Trump administration without help from the U.S.?

LAURA FINK, REBELLE COMMUNICATIONS FOUNDER AND CEO: When you have the presumptive Republican nominee for President going out and saying that he would encourage Putin to invade NATO allies should they not reach two percent of GDP for defense spending, that's a huge problem.

And President Biden, we saw a proportional response. He had to say something to reassure allies and to stand up to Vladimir Putin, particularly in the face of the failure to advance Ukraine aid and the fact that President Trump as the head of his party has scotched Ukraine aid time and time again.

Now, the NATO allies have reason to be afraid. They trust what Trump is and what he does. And certainly we see that they have increased their budgets over time, particularly Germany ramping up. They're at one point five percent right now. They'll move to two percent of GDP soon. This is a process that has been happening since Biden took the presidency.

KURTZ: Ben, wherever people stand on the NATO controversy, what do you make of Joe Biden, who usually shies away from the camera, suddenly using this televised White House speech to go after Trump on NATO?

DOMENECH: Well, I think that one of the things that still has a lot of residual value from the perspective of a lot of voters who lived through the Cold War and experienced the importance of NATO in that time is defending that alliance.

And in fact, you know, historically, it has been of great value to America. It's actually America that has, you know, had the original Article Five experience about post-9-11.

KURTZ: Article Five being the --

DOMENECH: -- willingness of --

KURTZ: Everybody will defend everybody else who's a member of NATO. Yeah.

DOMENECH: Defending our own skies.

KURTZ: yeah.

DOMENECH: And that's something that I think we need to keep in perspective on this. It's a force for American interests as opposed to against it. At the same time, I do think that the criticism that the President is making is one that is consistent with the rest of his party.

It's a myth to suggest that this is somehow a Trump-alone position within that party. It's one that is working its way through a lot of different things. And it was very interesting to me to see that, you know, 15 out of the 17 Republicans who voted against this aid package in the Senate were all younger than 55.

They're all the younger side of this coalition. And in the House, you know, the opposition to it has been even stronger among you know, the more populist conservatives within the Republican base. Donald Trump is not out of step with the rest of his party on this issue.

KURTZ: Well, I guess some of these younger people didn't live through the Cuban Missile Crisis and other confrontations with the old Soviet Union. Laura, Trump's on TV all the time, whether it's in front of a courthouse or at Mar-a-Lago. And he dominates the news.

Is Biden finally starting to heed that advice that he's got to show people that he's mentally fit, that he's competent, and not just have Kamala Harris and others say he's awesome in private?

FINK: Well, he's -- it's campaign season, so we're going to see everybody in the cameras a lot more. And I think we have to be careful, though, of just saying every time Biden gets in front of a camera that he's trying to disprove critiques about his age.

Any more than we can say every time Trump gets in front of a camera, he's trying to distract from the 91 criminal counts that he faces and the $355 million judgment for fraud that he faced this past week. I think that becomes a little bit overly simplistic. It's campaign season. We're going to see everybody in front of cameras a lot more.

KURTZ: Yeah, I would just say it's been campaign season for a while, but this does seem to be a turn. Now, I mentioned earlier the tragic, but in some ways not shocking, death of Alexei Navalny. And this is what the President had to say about that.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

BIDEN: Make no mistake, Putin is responsible for Navalny's death. We have to provide the funding so Ukraine can keep defending itself against Putin's vicious onslaughts and war crimes.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

KURTZ: So, that's the second time that Biden went before the cameras this week. And you know, Putin and his thugs are the ones being blamed for this. But he made the pivot to once again try to use Russian brutality as a reason to take a shot at Trump.

DOMENECH: So, I find the White House's reaction to this generally to be very disappointing and insufficient. And here's why. You know, we saw the news come, obviously, in the context of the Munich security conference. And you had Kamala Harris come out and give just a little bit of a spiel about it and then move on to her prepared remarks about rules-based order and all of that bland stuff that you hear on that stage.

The problem is this. The President promised that there would be devastating consequences if Alexei Navalny died in prison. That's what he said in 2021.

KURTZ: Yeah.

DOMENECH: Okay, now, he's shifted to we're just going to spend more money in Ukraine. That's not devastating consequences. It used to be, Howie, that if you identified a certain person who was imprisoned under a dictatorship, under a regime, and you said, as the United States of America, don't mess with them, that that meant something. And now it seems like that doesn't mean anything anymore.

KURTZ: Well, Biden's side of that is that since then we've had this war.

DOMENCH: Yes.

KURTZ: Imposed a lot of sanctions on Russia and done other things that obviously he couldn't have anticipated in 2021. But let me pivot. DOMENECH: Sure.

KURTZ: You can respond to that, but let me pivot. Does it trouble you at all that Donald Trump has said nothing about Navalny's death? Obviously, he had a friendly relationship with Putin when he was President.

DOMENECH: Absolutely. I think that he should. And I think it's actually a layup for him to say something about this, because it's something that I think would play both in his interests and that he could criticize the White House for not living up to its end of the deal.

But again, there are things that you can do that don't require more money from the Congress, more money from the American taxpayers that go after the many of them, hundreds of billions of dollars that are out there in terms of the oligarch available resources that have not been seized, that we can pressure our European allies to seize.

And frankly, the fact that we saw this all go down with Brittany Greiner before, there are a lot of other people who are currently there in Russia who we should be trying in making a more active push to get back, including Vladimir Kara-Murza, who is currently in prison there.

They haven't moved him to the Arctic Circle yet, but that's kind of the thing that happens. He's in isolation right now. And that's something that I think people need to be prepared for.

KURTZ: Laura, MSNBC Anchor Alex Witt yesterday, interviewing a Congressman, asked whether there was a link between Trump's comments on NATO and the death of Navalny. Does that cross a line? Because even his own allies and family expected he'd be killed eventually. And I think to try to take some words from Donald Trump and directly tie it doesn't fit well with me.

KURTZ: Well, that's not certainly something that I would do. I do think that there is rising concern, particularly, and I agree with Ben's earlier comments about the agreement on the right and the sort of drift toward supporting dictators. We saw CPAC in Hungary last year with Viktor Orban as a Speaker.

And this particular brand of right-wing ***politics***, romancing dictators, in love with Vladimir Putin going on Tucker Carlson's show, and a right-wing media operation that continues to support this romance with dictators. That is a huge problem for Biden.

KURTZ: Okay.

FINK: Trump continuing to support it with his words, also a problem because it impacts our allies and our foreign policy.

KURTZ: Let me just remind viewers who don't know the history that the Putin's regime tried to poison Navalny with nerve gas. And then when he recovered, he voluntarily went back in 2021 to Russia to continue his activism and a lot of people thought that was a very risky thing that could well result in his death.

And he was sent to these punishment cells, isolation, and he was losing weight and he was in failing health. And, but you know, the President also pivoted to the -- what he called the outrageous failure to provide more aid to Ukraine. Ben, you addressed that. And Trump does reflect a party that is divided over Ukraine, I'll grant you that.

DOMENECH: Obviously that, but I have to push back against this idea --

KURTZ: Push back.

DOMENECH: That there is some large romance among the conservative movement in America or the Republican Party writ large when it comes to dictators around the world.

I think their natural inclination is against them, both in China and Russia. And you can't just say that one aspect, one particular portion of the American conservative media representation represents the whole. That's just completely unfair.

KURTZ: Okay. When we come back, Alejandro Mayorkas gets impeached, take two. And are the pundits overplaying the flipping of George Santos' old seat?

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

KURTZ: It was a special election on Long Island that drew national media attention because the House seat belonged to the lying, fabricating, expelled, and indicted George Santos. So, when former Democratic Congressman Tom Suozzi beat Republican Mazi Phillip, excuse me, Pilip, the pundits weighed in on the supposed national implications.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

UNKNOWN: Fundamentally, I blame Santos. I mean, this guy's a fraud.

SCARBOROUGH: And man, if you're a House Republican this morning, you've got to be freaked out. You are not going to retain the majority.

KURTZ: Donald Trump's reaction was to blame Mazi Phillip saying, " -- she didn't endorse me and tried to straddle the fence when she would have easily won. I stayed out of the race. I want to be loved."

Maybe a little Valentine's Day message there. That same day, shortly after Republicans had been embarrassed by narrowly failing to impeach the Homeland Security Chief, Speaker Mike Johnson succeeded in bringing the political indictment against Alejandro Mayorkas by a single vote.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

LAURA INGRAHAM, "THE INGRAHAM ANGLE": President Trump gets impeached for a phone call and people are complaining that Mayorkas is impeached for what's happening to our country. I mean, this is real, real stuff happening and people are terrified.

CHARLES COLEMAN, JR. MSNBC LEGAL ANALYST: Speaker Johnson and his Republican caucus are doing the only thing they know how to do. Political theater, really for an audience won. You guessed it. Donald J. Trump.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

KURTZ: Ben, when it comes to impeaching Mayorkas, who certainly contributed to the three-year record of out-of-control legal migration at the southern border, isn't this more about the policy of symbolism in the sense of keeping the media spotlight on the border issue?

DOMENECH: I think it is to a certain extent, and maybe that's the implication, I think, that many members who voted on this issue certainly would agree with. I would argue historically, it's actually a far more appropriate use of impeachment. In the original drafting, in the original debate, Ben Franklin represented it as being used against officials who had, in his words, rendered themselves obnoxious.

The very first impeachment that happened of a judge underneath the founding generation that wrote those rules was for someone not who had engaged in some fanciful scene, but simply was bad at their job because they showed up drunk all the time.

And so, this is absolutely an appropriate use of impeachment, whether it actually results in the kind of ramifications from this administration that it should. I personally think they would be wise to use this as an excuse to cast Mayorkas aside, given how bad he's been at his job.

I knew we'd get a 1787 reference from you. Laura, first time a cabinet officer has been impeached in 150 years. Didn't the House Republicans -- didn't they impeach Mayorkas for carrying out Joe Biden's policies and isn't this going to go nowhere in the Democratic Senate?

FINK: They impeached Mayorkas, maybe because they think he's obnoxious, although I would worry if that's the standard we're holding people to for impeachment. I think you might see a lot of people lining up on both sides of the aisle there.

But I will say this, this really is wild to me that, and it demonstrates that the Republicans are in love with political theater and it has gotten to the point where it is the theater of the absurd.

You cannot throw down and kill border security legislation at the same time you're impeaching the titular head of that border security. It is patently ridiculous to choose to do nothing except theatrics while, and to continue this fight.

It's -- you would do something if you really cared other than impeach elected or appointed officials.

DOMENECH: Impeaching someone for not enforcing the law is absolutely justified and that law is something that's currently on the books. Regardless of what you think about the bill that was dismissed, I personally would never describe it as a border security bill and I've worked on border security bills before.

But, you know, the media and obviously the Democrats present it as such. But enforcing the law is your job in this role and so it's absolutely appropriate to impeach him whether it goes anywhere or not.

KURTZ: Right, I got to make a turn now to the Long Island special election. So, Ben, I'll give Tom Suozzi credit for taking a more moderate stance on illegal migration rather than running away from the issue. But didn't the seat really flip because of the stench of Santos?

DOMENECH: Well, I think it absolutely did, though I will say Tom Suozzi figured out how to talk about border security in a way that worked for him. And then you obviously had, once again, the issue of the lack of Republicans using early voting and you had a massive snowstorm the day of the election.

KURTZ: Yes.

DOMENECH: So, you know, once again, the former President Donald Trump was out this week bashing early voting. This is going to be a continued problem for Republicans unless they decide to finally go in a different direction on that. It's a practical problem for them.

KURTZ: Laura, I say this in every one-off local election, which is aren't the pundits hyperventilating by drawing all these national implications when it was a low turnout election, as Ben says in lousy weather, involving a Democrat who'd already held the seat?

FINK: Well, it's a different type of weather. It's a bellwether. And everything is going to be seen as a bellwether from now into election day. As, Howie, you said, we are thick in election season.

So, I don't think it's a bad thing to draw some national conclusions. I might draw different ones other than, you know, this means that there's going to be a blue wave. I think what you need to look at is the Democratic machine is working and is turning out their voters.

I think you're seeing that the fact that the immigration issue will be salient and Republican inaction, even in the face of getting virtually everything they wanted in the bill and then refusing to pass it is going to hurt them in November.

KURTZ: Well, that's up for debate, too.

FINK: And so, I think you can look at things like that.

KURTZ: All right.

FINK: And draw conclusions.

KURTZ: Of course, there's also Trump's opposition to the bill. Look, if it's a bellwether, Tom Suozzi also criticized and distanced himself from President Biden. So, we'll see if that is something that other people follow.

And fun fact, minutes before the election was called, George Santos predicted the Republicans would win. And then he sent a group text to the Republicans who helped kick him out of the House full of cursing. So, he's still getting attention.

Thank you both. Up next, how Joe Biden's team secretly pressured Merrick Garland to heavily edit the special counsel's report on classified documents.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

KURTZ: When President Biden's lawyers got a look at the forthcoming report on his mishandling of classified documents, they privately pressed special counsel Robert Hur to water down the language and then complained in writing to Merrick Garland.

We object to the multiple denigrating statements about President Biden's memory, which violate longstanding DOJ practice and policy. They said that Biden should not be criticized for a practice that his predecessors openly engaged in.

And joining us now, oh, wait a second. I have to read more. The Attorney General refused to change a word in the report the next day. And joining us now, Sarah Bedford, Reporter for "The Washington Examiner", and Jackie Heinrich, Fox News White House Correspondent.

Sarah, can you imagine if Merrick Garland, under pressure, had taken and watered down some of what is in Robert Hur's report, what the media reaction would have been?

SARAH BEDFORD, "WASHINGTON EXAMINER" INVESTIGATIONS EDITOR: I think it would have been actually pretty minimal. I think the media has been highly critical of Robert Hur simply for following Justice Department regulations.

And I think they've given a lot of leeway to the way the White House has criticized Robert Hur in a way that when the Trump White House was critical of Robert Mueller, for example, when Bill Barr put out a short letter characterizing the Mueller report before it was released during the Trump presidency.

KURTZ: That was a pretty big story.

BEDFORD: Exactly. The Justice Department took a huge amount of criticism for, in their eyes, intervening in the way the Mueller report was going to be perceived.

I don't think the White House has gotten enough criticism for this action. By the way, Jackie, if the Attorney General had actually whitewashed the report, instead he had a career official write back, wouldn't this have leaked in about 10 seconds?

JACQUI HEINRICH, FOX NEWS WHITE HOUSE CORRESPONDENT: Absolutely.

KURTZ: And don't you think the media would have gone nuts over this?

HEINRICH: I think they would have. I think that's why they did not choose to, you know, adjust any of Hur's language in any way. I think that it would have conflicted with this President's pledge to have his hands off the DOJ.

The letter in itself to, you know, the DOJ, to Garland, saying, look, we've got a problem with this, that sort of chafes at his position a little bit. But at the end of the day, Garland didn't do anything, and Biden didn't use any executive privilege either.

KURTZ: Right.

HEINRICH: He let this whole thing get out there in its entirety. Yeah. I think Garland saved Biden from his lawyers. Meanwhile, White House spokesman Ian Sams sent a letter to the press corps objecting to the coverage of the report, saying that it wasn't just that he willfully obtained classified documents.

But that there wasn't enough evidence to charge him. That didn't go over too well with the press corps. So, let me turn now, Sarah, to the key witness, a key witness, in the Republican impeachment probe of Joe Biden, FBI informant Alexander Smirnoff, who has now been indicted for lying about alleged Biden family corruption.

This is a star witness for Jim Comer, often cited by Fox and other outlets. And I think the story deserves even more coverage. What do you think?

HEINRICH: I do think so. I mean, there was someone during the Mueller investigation, as well, who was convicted of something very similar, contributing to the Steele dossier. He ended up being acquitted.

But there are some parallels here in that maybe the basis of the core of some of the allegations against the Biden family were built on lies. I don't think, though, that the impeachment inquiry here is necessarily completely undermined by this one fact, because so much additional evidence has been gathered. But certainly this is the blow to the credibility of the allegations against the Biden family.

KURTZ: Yeah, I wouldn't say completely undermined. But the indictment says that in 2020, Smirnoff told the FBI he knew that executives of Burisma, the Ukrainian energy giant, and it was public knowledge that Hunter Biden was on the board, hired him to protect the firm through his dad. And the FBI now says that's a lie. Big problem?

HEINRICH: Huge problem. I think Jim Comey is going to have to lay out all of the evidence outside of this claim that makes the impeachment inquiry still valid. I mean, you remember House Republicans were sounding off for a couple of months.

I mean, they threatened to hold the FBI director in contempt to get a hold of this 1023 form in which this witness makes his allegation. So, with this, you know, guy now having his credibility shot, a lot of onus on House Republicans to say that the impeachment inquiry is still warranted.

KURTZ: I love that you know it's a 1023 Form. All right, next on Media Buzz, huge, large coverage of Georgia D.A. Fani Willis testifying about her prosecutor boyfriend and their financial dealings. Will she be kicked off the Trump case?

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

KURTZ: Fani Willis, the Georgia D.A. facing disqualification in her case against Donald Trump, delivered combative testimony at a hearing carried by all three cable news networks.

She admitted having a sexual relationship with Nathan Wade, who she hired to be Chief Prosecutor against the former President. But both of them insisted there was no improper overlap involving his hiring or financial benefit to Willis.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

FANI WILLIS, FULTON COUNTY, GEORGIA DISTRICT ATTORNEY: It's ridiculous to me that you lied on Monday and yet here we still are. I think in one of your motions you tried to implicate and slept with him at that conference, which I find to be extremely offensive.

UNKNOWN: Did you pay him back?

WILLIS: For the cruise and for Aruba? Yeah, I gave him his money before we ever went on that trip. You're confused. You think I'm on trial. These people are on trial for trying to steal an election in 2020. I'm not on trial no matter how hard you try to put me on trial.

UNKNOWN: When the romantic relationship ended, that's the question.

WILLIS: Sometime in, I'd say late summer of 2023. But I don't believe me in -- because this is what you're really asking about. This is the salaciousness of all of this, right?

JESSE WATERS, "JESSE WATERS PRIMETIME": Probably a bad idea to have two sleazy lying lovers waste taxpayer money on romantic vacations while prosecuting the President and then concoct the most unbelievable cover-up in Georgia history.

MIKA BRZEZINSKI, "MORNING JOE" CO-HOST: She was angry for a number of reasons and many of them she didn't bring up. She obviously doesn't like being lied about. She obviously doesn't like having her personal life dragged out into the open and also lied about.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

KURTZ: Sarah Bedford, as a television spectacle, what did you make of Fani Willis rambling about her love life, her sex life, saying yes, she started dating married Attorney Nathan Wade in 2022, but that was after, she had hired him as Prosecutor.

BEDFORD: Well, from, you know, a television perspective, it was certainly riveting. I mean, we were all glued to the TV all day during it.

From a legal perspective, I think the consensus is a little bit split about whether she will or will not be disqualified, but where there is agreement is that her credibility took a major hit from this affair.

I mean, she was unable to really give compelling answers about the start of the timeline, but whether she actually ever paid Nathan Wade back and how - -

KURTZ: You know, at a minimum, everybody is saying, what was she thinking? Now, Jackie Heinrich, the D.A. was asked why she kept thousands of dollars in cash in her home, why she paid or repaid Nathan Wade in cash for the trips they took, including two cruises and why she didn't have any receipts. So raw that it made me cringe at times.

HEINRICH: Well, I don't know that I agree that her credibility took a hit there. I think, you know, you heard people in the black community hearing her answer that, you know, people keep cash in their houses and being like, yeah, you know, so, there's that.

I think also at the end of the day, you know, Jonathan Turley said it best, that where she was combative, she was confrontational. She made her case and a lot of people celebrated her on the left.

Juxtapose that with if the former President had done the exact same thing, what would -- how people have received that? I think you can sort of, you know, applaud that for more debate there, but certainly riveting to watch, as Sarah mentioned --

KURTZ: All right. We have a consensus on that. Let's just talk briefly about she made a snap decision to testify and she was angry when she got out there. Originally, she was fighting subpoena. And the money aspect is crucial because that would be the thing that kicked off the case and perhaps her office with her.

BEDFORD: Right. And I think that that was sort of some of the commentary that we saw was that, you know, these are prosecutors who have built some charges that are sometimes being stretched beyond, you know, the letter of the statute to charge Trump because no one is above the law and, you know, accountability is at the forefront of these efforts.

So, for a prosecutor here to have sort of chafed at even being asked questions about whether she followed the rules when she is enforcing them so aggressively and part of this effort to enforce them so aggressively, I think exposes a little bit of hypocrisy in this effort that does cut at the credibility of the case.

KURTZ: Jacqui, there was also just briefly the question of why she kept the relationship secret, not just from colleagues in the office, but from her own father. Wasn't this like eavesdropping on a soap opera?

HEINRICH: In a lot of ways.

KURTZ: Yeah.

HEINRICH: I think it was.

KURTZ: That's why you watched.

HEINRICH: That's why I watched. But, you know, I think also there's the question of at what point was it unethical? Was it unethical to, you know, hire someone after you'd started a relationship or start a relationship with someone after you'd hired them?

KURTZ: Yeah.

HEINRICH: You know, either way, it's sort of a dangerous spot to be in when you're having to answer those questions. I think that she tried effectively to remind people that she's actually not the one, yeah, accused of, you know, the sort of heart of this whole thing, which is the case that Trump's involved in stealing an election, as she put it.

KURTZ: She certainly tried to do that. Whether she's successful, we'll probably find out in the coming days. Meanwhile, a New York judge fined Donald Trump $355 million in that civil fraud case involving his company in New York. And at the same time, that was almost everything that New York A.G. Letitia James asked for.

You know, they were doing a happy dance on MSNBC, with the exception of Katy Tur. Everyone else was just sort of reveling in this judgment and how Trump is going to pay it. Sarah.

BEDFORD: I think, yeah, sober legal analysis of the merits of that decision kind of went out the window seeing how hard Trump may be hit financially, the fact that him and his sons are barred from doing business in New York for a few years.

There are rules in the court system about the size of damages having to be, you know, commensurate with the actual underlying offense. Here, there were no victims, no money was lost. That was something the defense argued at length.

So, this could end up being a pretty short-lived victory for Trump's critics, because you know, there have been Supreme Court decisions, it's precedent, that just because a defendant is rich doesn't mean that the penalty can be grown to hit him financially that hard.

KURTZ: Well, here's what Donald Trump had to say about it. Take a look.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

TRUMP: A crooked New York state judge just ruled that I have to pay a fine of $355 million for having built a perfect company.

Great cash, great buildings, great everything. Letitia James, that's another case altogether. She's a horribly corrupt attorney general, and it's all having to do with election interference.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

KURTZ: So, Judge Engoron, who Trump frequently attacked during the trial, said that the lack of remorse bordered on pathological. But at the same time, Jacqui, this is true, and Trump made this point repeatedly.

The banks made money. Nobody lost money. Nobody was a victim here. In fact, the banks made millions of dollars on these loans for Trump properties.

HEINRICH: Yeah, and I think that, you know, that's an effective talking point that has been, you know, put out there and echoed by not just his supporters, either. I mean, legal experts saying that this is sort of an unusual case in that way.

KURTZ: Case. In that way. Yeah.

HEINRICH: You know, I also think that there's been a worthy discussion of what kind of impact this might have on business in the state of New York if business is going to move out of there. You know, how often does this happen?

And I want to preface this by saying I'm not a lawyer, so I can't tell you, you know, with any sort of background just how unusual it is. But what I note is that the sort of two sides are very dug in on their reflection of this case.

And there is a larger middle than we see in the other cases in terms of legal experts citing different things that in this case more tend to support Trump.

KURTZ: Okay, and then there's this other case I know you've got to have a scoreboard to keep track of all this. A trial date of March 25th was set in the case in New York involving Stormy Daniels and hush money. And let's see what the former president had to say about that.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

TRUMP: This is no crime. But outside, right outside their courthouse, this courthouse, people are being murdered. So, it's a very unfair situation. They want to keep me nice and busy so I can't campaign so hard.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

KURTZ: Sarah, isn't this of all the four criminal cases the least important by far?

BEDFORD: It's the least important. Yeah. In terms of the implications for him holding the presidency again, it has nothing to do with, you know, classified material, national defense or the 2020 election.

KURTZ: Or January 6th. Yeah.

BEDFORD: It's the oldest of the cases. We're talking about something that happened eight years ago. And this wasn't the plan from the Biden Justice Department. The election subversion case in Washington, D.C. was supposed to go first.

KURTZ: Yes.

BEDFORD: They wanted it to start on March 4th.

KURTZ: But it got -- it got --

BEDFORD: That didn't happen.

KURTZ: It got slowed up by these appeals.

BEDFORD: So, I don't think that this was the outcome that Democrats want for the weakest of the cases, the most likely for him to be acquitted on to move forward. And even if he is, you know, convicted, he's not going looking at jail time, really, in this case.

KURTZ: Well, Okay. I mean, they did bring it as a felony. But, Jacqui, are these charges by Manhattan D.A., Alvin Bragg, an elected Democrat, seen by many as the most blatantly partisan?

HEINRICH: Yes. Just yes, period. That's just sort of --

KURTZ: Yeah. You could say more if you want.

HEINRICH: That's the consensus. And I do think, to Sarah's point, having this come first will sort of energize what we've seen in the past, which is that his base gets more riled up, more defensive of him. He grows. He strengthens in the polls. And it's probably not the case that's going to concern any, you know, fence sitters in the election and say, well, maybe I need to reconsider my vote. Not the folks who maybe the Biden campaign is hoping will be following headlines about cases.

They want to see us talking about January 6th in the media.

KURTZ: Right.

HEINRICH: And we're going to be talking about Stormy Daniels and his base is going to be happy about that.

KURTZ: Yeah.

HEINRICH: I think the media also kind of likes talking about Stormy Daniels. But the case has been around since the end of the 2016 campaign. She was paid hush money. But it just doesn't feel like it's on the level of these other cases, as you guys have said. Sarah Bedford, thanks very much.

Jacqui, stick around. After the break, the strange case of the media making public a secret Russian weapon after a Republican lawmaker challenged the White House.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

KURTZ: Now, this was bizarre. Mike Turner, the Chairman of the House Intel Committee, publicly asked President Biden to declassify information about a foreign threat to national security. The White House was furious. The cable news coverage exploded and the details soon leaked to Fox and many other outlets.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

JESSE WATERS, "JESSE WATERS PRIMETIME": America is apparently facing a national security threat from Russia that's so terrifying that our own government said they couldn't tell us what it is.

ANDERSON COOPER, CNN ANCHOR: Was Mike Turner's objective to kind of wake House Republicans up a little bit about Russia's intentions or the reality of Russia? I mean, that's an interesting idea.

MATTHEW CONTINETTI, AMERICAN ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE: Anyone who recalls the Chinese spy balloon incident knows why Chairman Turner released this announcement to force this issue.

LAURA COATES, "LAURA COATES LIVE": Tonight, CNN is learning that the U.S. has new intelligence on Putin's efforts to launch a nuclear anti-satellite system in space.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

KURTZ: Back with Jackie Heinrich. How did the White House react when Mike Turner, in effect, made this public?

HEINRICH: Well, they were very surprised. They were not expecting to take questions on it. Jake Sullivan was in the briefing room. He was there to talk about other issues. And the briefing was delayed quite a while because Turner put out this, not just this letter to members, but also a press release that sort of geared up the media to start looking for answers on it.

I think the fallout has been, you know, sort of the question posed by people, what was Turner trying to do to his colleagues? Was he trying to get them interested in passing 702 to the FISA Reform?

KURTZ: Yeah.

HEINRICH: Or was he trying to fast track Ukraine aid? My sourcing says --

KURTZ: Which he has been very much in favor of.

HEINRICH: Supportive of. My sources are saying that this was actually, he was trying to move the White House on something, not Congress.

KURTZ: It's funny because usually these things are discussed quietly behind closed doors. But you know, it only took hours for the leaks to begin to major news organizations to reveal that this was a not yet functioning Russian weapon in space. Some called it by the short end of a space laser or anti-satellite weapon.

And that was confirmed by Joe Biden, a presser, on Friday. But was it responsible for the media to run with this and let the Kremlin know that we know what they're doing?

HEINRICH: Well, I mean, I think that that's an answer that the White House has been cagey on because they have not outright said that sources and methods of intelligence gathering were compromised.

KURTZ: But that's actually --

HEINRICH: They've said they've had the concern.

KURTZ: But I'm glad you raised that because people will, the way we get this information is often through human sources and it certainly is a possibility --

HEINRICH: Right.

KURTZ: -- that this jeopardized that.

HEINRICH: We don't know exactly how this intelligence arrived with the U.S. But what we do know is that Turner was concerned that the White House wasn't doing enough to address it. And he said in his press release, the White House wasn't talking to allies and partners.

I've since learned that it wasn't just allies and partners that the White House needed to talk to. They were trying to talk to other countries that are trying to get their assets in space. China, Russia, Iran and India and the U.S. are the five countries involved in the space race. They believe that Russia would respond uniquely to China and India going against them on this. And that's what was underway.

KURTZ: But bottom line, you don't have a problem with the press revealing the nature of this secret Russian weapon?

HEINRICH: I don't know. I mean, I think that's just bound to happen when you put out a press release. We're going to start asking questions.

KURTZ: Yes. No, that's our job and that's your job at the White House. Jacqui Heinrich, thanks very much. Still to come, the aftermath of the Super Bowl and Jon Stewart beating up on both Presidents?

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

KURTZ: What a horrifying tragedy as thousands in Kansas City turned out for a parade celebrating their Super Bowl champions. Gunfire erupted. One woman was killed. More than 20 people wounded, half of them children, some as young as eight.

It sounded like a mass shooting, but police, who have now charged two juvenile suspects with gun offenses and resisting arrest, say they opened fire on each other. Some of the chiefs, including Patrick Mahomes, posted messages of support. Travis Kelce said he was heartbroken.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

KURTZ: None of this should detract from the Chief's dramatic overtime win over the 49ers that included Travis Kelce angrily confronting coach Andy Reid. He wanted to be put back in the game.

And even his brother, Jason Kelce, says he crossed the line. And Travis, of course, got a postgame kiss from his girlfriend, Taylor Swift, who might have had something to do with the record-breaking audience of 123 million.

I wasn't surprised as someone who's been on "The Daily Show" and interviewed Jon Stewart many times that he was pretty funny when he returned to the program after a nine-year absence and only on Mondays. But when Stewart was talking about Joe Biden's memory problems, he did this.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

JON STEWART, "THE DAILY SHOW" HOST: The footage of the President, unable to recall simple facts, must have been brutal to watch.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

TRUMP: James Webb. I don't remember the numbers. I don't remember the numbers. I don't remember ever buying something for myself.

UNKNOWN: Do you recall what years you were married to Ms. Maples?

TRUMP: I mean, I don't remember that.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

KURTZ: And I thought, there goes the liberal crusader again, beating up on Donald Trump. But then Stewart turned his attention to the current president.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

KAMALA HARRIS, U.S. VICE PRESIDENT: The President was in front of and on top of it all, coordinating and directing leaders.

STEWART: Did anyone film that? Because if you're telling us behind the scenes he is sharp and full of energy and on top of it and really in control and leading, you should film that. That would be good to show to people instead of a TikTok where he goes, "Jersey chip cookies".

(END VIDEO CLIP)

KURTZ: Stewart, who is also executive producer, spent a longer time making fun of Biden than he did mocking Trump, sending a signal that he'll take on both sides. And left-wing viewers started complaining. How dare you?

Well, that's it for this edition of Media Buzz. I'm Howard Kurtz. We only had to rewrite the show about nine times this week. 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 Apple iTunes is a good place to do it. Hey, we're back here next Sunday, 11 Eastern, with the only media analysis show on national television.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

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