

TRANSCRIPTS

Meet the Press – September 8, 2024

Steve Kornacki, Sen. Raphael Warnock (D-Ga.), Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), Gov. Doug Burgum (R-N.D.), Yamiche Alcindor, Ashley Etienne, Sara Fagen and Lauren Mayk



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KRISTEN WELKER:

This Sunday: Great expectations. Vice President Kamala Harris and former President Donald Trump are set to face off on the debate stage in Philadelphia in what could be a pivotal moment for both campaigns.

VICE PRES. KAMALA HARRIS:

Donald Trump wants to take our country backward.

FMR. PRES. DONALD TRUMP:

This is a woman who is dangerous.

KRISTEN WELKER:

How will the debate impact the race? Steve Kornacki breaks down the latest polls. Plus: High school horror.

STUDENT 1:

No matter where you are, you're not safe.

STUDENT 2:

I never thought it was going to happen to me, and it did.

KRISTEN WELKER:

After a school shooting in Georgia, the issue of gun violence returns to the political conversation.

VICE PRES. KAMALA HARRIS:

It doesn't have to be this way.

SEN. JD VANCE:

I don't like that this is a fact of life. But if you're - if you are a psycho and you want to make headlines, you realize that our schools are soft targets.

KRISTEN WELKER:

And: Binary choices. Former Republican Congresswoman Liz Cheney and her father Dick Cheney become the latest high-profile Republicans to endorse Kamala Harris.

FMR. REP. LIZ CHENEY:

There's never been an individual in our country who is as grave a threat to our democracy as Donald Trump is.

KRISTEN WELKER:

My guests this morning: Democratic Senator Raphael Warnock of Georgia, Independent Senator Bernie **Sanders** of Vermont and Republican Governor Doug Burgum of North Dakota. Joining me for insight and analysis are: NBC News Washington correspondent Yamiche Alcindor; Lauren Mayk, political reporter for NBC 10 Philadelphia; Republican strategist Sara Fagen; and Ashley Etienne, former communications director to Vice President Harris. Welcome to Sunday, it's Meet the Press.

ANNOUNCER:

From NBC News in Washington, the longest-running show in television history, this is Meet the Press with Kristen Welker.

KRISTEN WELKER:

Good Sunday morning. We are just two days away from one of the most pivotal moments of this election so far. Vice President Kamala Harris and former President Donald Trump will face off for their first debate in Philadelphia Tuesday night, just eight weeks before election day.

DONALD TRUMP:

We're run by stupid people, stupid, stupid people. And we found that out at the debate with Jill. How did that work out? And we're going to find it out again on Tuesday night.

REPORTER:

What's the one thing you want to really get across to him?

VICE PRES. KAMALA HARRIS:

Well, there's a lot. But look, it's time to turn the page on the divisiveness. It's time to bring our country together, chart a new way forward.

KRISTEN WELKER:

The vice president has been huddling with aides at a Pittsburgh hotel, according to multiple sources familiar with her debate preparations. The team is expected to hold several 90-minute dress rehearsals, complete with lecterns and television lighting. Former President Trump has held a handful of sessions so far with campaign allies, pointedly calling them "policy time" instead of "debate prep." How will both candidates define their positions on critical issues from the economy, to abortion, immigration, foreign policy and guns? It comes against a tragic backdrop. The nation is reeling after the deadliest school shooting this year, this time in the small community of Winder, Georgia, where two students and two teachers were killed when a 14-year-old student opened fire, according to authorities. Now that student and his father have both been charged after his father gifted his son the AR-style rifle that police say was used in the attack.

VICE PRES. KAMALA HARRIS:

It's just outrageous that every day in our country in the United States of America, that parents have to send their children to school worried about whether or not their child will come home alive.

SEN. JD VANCE:

I don't like this. I don't like to admit this. I don't like that this is the fact of life. But if you're - if you are a psycho and you want to make headlines, you realize that our schools are soft targets. And we have got to bolster security at our schools.

KRISTEN WELKER:

Both candidates will undoubtedly be pressed on that issue Tuesday night. Among the other key questions, how will Harris differentiate herself from President Biden? How will she explain shifting some policy positions? Can former President Trump stay on message? And will he resort to personal attacks? Vice President Harris is getting new support from an unlikely source.

INTERVIEWER:

Dick Cheney, your father, a beloved figure among Democrats for many, many years, would you care to share with us who he might be voting for?

FMR. REP. LIZ CHENEY:

Dick Cheney will be voting for Kamala Harris.

KRISTEN WELKER:

In a statement, former Vice President Dick Cheney writing, quote, "In our nation's 248-year history there has never been an individual who is a greater threat to our republic than Donald Trump." Mr. Trump fired back, "Dick Cheney is an irrelevant RINO, along with his daughter, who lost by the largest margin in the history of congressional races." Harris, for her part, weighing in on Saturday.

VICE PRES. KAMALA HARRIS:

People are exhausted about the division and the attempts to kind of divide us as Americans. And them stepping up to make this public statement, I think is courageous but also, for people like the folks I was just talking with, it really reinforces for them that we love our country and we have more in common than what separates us.

KRISTEN WELKER:

For more on where the razor-tight race stands in the battleground states, I'm joined by national political correspondent Steve Kornacki. Steve, break it all down for us. Two days until the debate, where do things stand?

STEVE KORNACKI:

Yeah, Kristen. Two days before this debate this is what you're looking at in the seven core battleground states. You are seeing razor-thin contests here. You see less than a point, less than a point, one point. Seven battleground states here that we think are likely to decide the Electoral College, the road to 270. Now, take a closer look here, and there are a couple things we want to draw your attention to. First, you do notice there's one state here, Wisconsin, where the margin does seem larger than the others. Put a pin in that because we're going to get to that in one second. But the other aspect here, when you look at these close races, particularly in the sun belt states, it reflects how this race has changed a little bit since Kamala Harris replaced Joe Biden as the Democratic candidate. What we're going to show you here, this is the diversity of the electorates in the seven core battleground states, white and non-white. And you can see nationally this is what the electorate looks like. These three states, Nevada, North Carolina, and Georgia, you see the share of the electorate that's white is actually lower in these three states than it is nationally. The share of the electorate that is non-white is actually higher. One of the things that has happened since Kamala Harris replaced Joe Biden is that Biden had been struggling relative to how Democrats historically do, with Hispanic voters, with Black voters, with non-white voters. Harris improved on Biden's standing with those voters. She's not at the levels that Democrats have typically run at in the past, but she's improved. And so when we just

showed you those close margins in these states here, that's the source of Harris' improvement. These states are looking more promising for her than they were for Joe Biden. But again, she's not at the level Democrats typically get with non-white voters. That's something her campaign is looking at trying to boost and trying to improve. The other end of it, though, is this. Look at the states here, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Pennsylvania with the highest shares of white voters. Specifically here we're going to look at blue collar white voters, white voters who don't have four-year degrees. And again, you see the national average here, 35%. Look where Wisconsin, Michigan, and Pennsylvania are in their electorates. The key here is remember, we just showed you that poll that had Harris up by five-and-a-half on average, the average poll. In Wisconsin, well, Wisconsin has the highest share of non-college white voters. These are the voters the polls missed on in 2020, missed on in 2016. They undercounted, the polls did, Trump support with blue collar white voters. So when you see polls this fall, particularly in a state like Wisconsin, I think you put a little bit of an asterisk next to it because we saw big misses there before. And the question is are we seeing misses there again? Is Trump perhaps being undercounted in those states again? But again, two days into this debate, Kristen, the big issues that are likely to come up here, just take a look from a Wall Street Journal poll where the two candidates stand here in terms of the public's view. Harris with an advantage on abortion of 20 points. She's made this a centerpiece for a long time now. The economy, immigration, the Israel-Hamas war, these are all Trump advantages over Harris, although Harris doing a little bit better on some of these questions, again, than Biden had, but not where her campaign would like her to be, Kristen.

KRISTEN WELKER:

All underscoring how high stakes Tuesday night is. Steve Kornacki, thank you so much for joining us.

STEVE KORNACKI:

Got it.

KRISTEN WELKER:

Joining me now is Democratic Senator Raphael Warnock of Georgia. Senator Warnock, welcome back to Meet The Press.

SEN. RAPHAEL WARNOCK:

Great to be here with you. Good morning.

KRISTEN WELKER:

Well, good morning to you, Senator. Our thoughts are with you and everyone in the state of Georgia after that horrific school shooting this week. Of course, you have been in your position in the wake of other mass shootings as well. What makes this instance unique though, Senator, is the fact that a father has now been charged after giving his son the weapon that authorities say was used in the mass shooting a year after the father was questioned by the FBI for online threats that his son was making. Do you think that there is any law that could have prevented this tragedy in your state, Senator?

SEN. RAPHAEL WARNOCK:

Well, let me just say that I spent Friday night with the wonderful people of Winder, Georgia. And I thought about it as I was sitting there and thought about my own days as a high school student a long time ago. But it was Friday night. We should've been at a high school football game with high school students cheering on their classmates. Instead, they were mourning their classmates and two teachers. Look, we can do better than this. We - we have to begin with the fact that this is a tragic form of American exceptionalism. This doesn't happen all over the world. No - nowhere else - where you have a country that's not at war - do you have this kind of routine random violence as just a part of - of the tragic everyday lives of people. And so there are a whole range of things that need to be done, and I find it deep - deeply, deeply frustrating, that in the wake of this we can't bring ourselves, we can't find a will to do what we Americans agree on. And that's a whole range of things. But we have to start with the fact that this - this can't continue and that we can fix it.

KRISTEN WELKER:

Senator, I guess just going back to my original question though, is there a specific law that you think could have prevented this tragedy when you have a case of a father gifting his son the weapon, according to authorities?

SEN. RAPHAEL WARNOCK:

We - listen. 14-year-olds don't need AR-15s, and we need to get these military-style weapons off the streets. 87% of Americans - Democrats and Republicans, according to a Fox News report last year - believe that we ought to have universal background checks and still we can't even get that done in Congress. Listen, there - there is no one single law that will stop all of these tragedies. I - in a sense, I think we have to broaden the scope of the question because after all we have two mass shootings a day in our country, based on the data just last year. And this does not happen everywhere in the world. The problem is that we have politicians in our country who are beholden to the gun lobby. And either based on ambition or fear, they go to work every day doing their bidding while the gun lobby lines its pockets with the blood of our children. I can tell

you, as a father, that there's nothing more precious than that morning time when you walk your kid to school or drop them off. And - and you want to believe reasonably that a few hours later you're going to be able to pick them up. And - and the reality is that in America it's not safe to be in our schools. It's not safe to be in our shopping malls. It's not safe to be in the spa. It's not safe to be in a medical clinic. We're all sitting ducks. And any country that allows this to continue without putting forward just common sense gun safety measures is a country that has, in a - in a tragic way, lost its way. Politicians need to realign their values.

KRISTEN WELKER:

Yeah.

SEN. RAPHAEL WARNOCK:

And this is what it means to have a democracy. If we can't protect our children, what are we doing?

KRISTEN WELKER:

Senator, let me ask you about some - some specific policies. In 2019, then Senator Harris said she would support a mandatory gun buy-back program for assault weapons. Now her campaign says - and told me overnight again - she will not push for mandatory buy-backs but has expressed support for an assault weapons ban, expanded background checks, red flag laws. But do you think that's a mistake? Should she also be, in your opinion, supporting a mandatory gun buy-back program?

SEN. RAPHAEL WARNOCK:

Listen, we - we're not going to be able to get where we need to go without action in Congress. We've got to pass some laws to deal with this. Now, I was heartened by the fact that two years ago, we finally did a gun safety law: the Safer Communities Act. And it was the first gun safety law we passed in 30 years. 30 years. And it was modest, but it did save lives. But clearly, in the wake of what happened just the other day in Winder, Georgia, it's not enough. And the best - the least we can do is move forward on the bipartisan spaces where ordinary people agree. Clearly, there's a disconnect between what the people, the American people want and what they're able to get out of their government. Again, 87% of Americans believe in background checks, and yet I hear politicians say that it's not guns who kill people, it's people who kill people. And yet we don't even want to know who those people are.

KRISTEN WELKER:

But Senator -

SEN. RAPHAEL WARNOCK:

We - we won't even support -

KRISTEN WELKER:

Senator, just -

SEN. RAPHAEL WARNOCK:

- common sense -

KRISTEN WELKER:

- yes or no though -

SEN. RAPHAEL WARNOCK:

- gun reform.

KRISTEN WELKER:

- should she support that mandatory buy-back program? Just a yes or no.

SEN. RAPHAEL WARNOCK:

Listen, look, as a pastor I've done back - buy-back programs. You can pick this issue or that issue. But I think that, again, there's not one single thing that will make all of this go away.

KRISTEN WELKER:

Alright. Senator, let me play you something that J.D. Vance had to say. He made headlines this week by saying, "The way to deal with this issue is to focus in part on school security." Take a look.

[START TAPE]

SEN. JD VANCE:

You've got some states that don't have strict gun laws at all, and the states with strict gun laws, they have a lot of school shootings. And the states without strict gun laws, some of them have school shootings too. So clearly strict gun laws is not the thing that is going to solve this problem. What is going to solve this problem, and I really do believe this, is, look, I don't like this. I don't like to admit this. I don't like that this is a fact of life. But if you're - you are a psycho, and you want to make headlines, you'd realize that our schools are soft targets. And we have got to bolster security at our schools.

[END TAPE]

KRISTEN WELKER:

Senator, as you know, he is expressing the opinion of a lot of folks across this country. What's your response to hearing that?

SEN. RAPHAEL WARNOCK:

Listen, JD Vance claims that this kind of random, routine carnage is a fact of life. No, it's not. It's a fact of American life. This, again, is a tragic form of American exceptionalism. Nowhere else in the world do you have a country that's not at war do you see this kind of violence. And so we have to ask ourselves, we have to engage in serious soul-searching as Americans. Why does this - why does this happen here? There are people who - who are - are given to violence in other countries. I hate it when people - people malign the mentally ill because most of them are not a danger to us. But there are people who are mentally sick in other countries. There are children who are troubled in other countries. This - this only happens here.

KRISTEN WELKER:

Senator -

SEN. RAPHAEL WARNOCK:

It's the guns.

KRISTEN WELKER:

Senator let me -

SEN. RAPHAEL WARNOCK:

- And - and those who want to make this - yes.

KRISTEN WELKER:

Let me ask you quickly -

SEN. RAPHAEL WARNOCK:

This - this is not a debate between those who believe in the Second Amendment and those who don't - don't. It is to the gun lobby's advantage that this has become a kind of culture war. It - it's like saying in another time that those who want seatbelts are against the freedom of being on the road. In - in hindsight, we understand how ridiculous that argument would be. We need to put forward reasonable gun safety laws, and that's the least we can do for our children.

KRISTEN WELKER:

Senator, very quickly let me ask you about the debate. Here's what Donald Trump has had to say about Vice President Harris just this week. Quote, "She does nothing but talk, nothing but gripe, nothing but complain about the terrible border or the economy and inflation. But she's been there for three and a half years, so why doesn't she fix it?" Presumably, he'll make that argument on the debate stage. How do you think she should respond to that?

SEN. RAPHAEL WARNOCK:

Well, listen, I - I don't think she's going to underestimate Donald Trump. After all, he's been engaged in these debates at the presidential level since 2016. I think on the issue of the border, she ought to ask him why is it that he killed the border deal that we got - that - that was ready to be passed in Congress, written by a conservative Republican. And yet he decided that he would rather have the issue for the election rather than solve the - the issue for the American people. This is consistent with Donald Trump. Donald Trump is for Donald Trump. And Kamala Harris has spent her life working for the people. Kamala Harris for the people. I think that's who will show up on Tuesday night.

KRISTEN WELKER:

Alright. Senator Warnock, thank you so much for joining us. We really appreciate it. And when we come back, former President Trump is getting ready for his first match-up with Vice President Harris. How will he handle his new opponent? Republican Governor Doug Burgum of North Dakota joins me next.

KRISTEN WELKER:

Welcome back. And joining me now is Republican Governor Doug Burgum of North Dakota. Governor Burgum, welcome back to Meet the Press.

GOV. DOUG BURGUM:

Great to be here, Kristen. Thank you.

KRISTEN WELKER:

Thank you so much for being here in person. We really appreciate it. I want to start off with the debate, just two days away now. And I want to play you some of what we have heard recently from former President Donald Trump as it relates to Kamala Harris. Take a look.

[START TAPE]

FMR. PRES.DONALD TRUMP:

She was a bum three weeks ago. She was a bum. Because she's dumb. That's the laugh of a person with some big problems. I don't have a lot of respect for her intelligence. I'm a better-looking person than Kamala. She's a nasty person.

[END TAPE]

KRISTEN WELKER:

Governor, do you think that's the kind of rhetoric voters want to hear on the debate stage Tuesday night? Will that win him the debate?

GOV. DOUG BURGUM:

Well, I think what's going to win the debate and what's going to win the election goes right back to his economic speech that he delivered in New York on Thursday. Because the number one issue for voters across this country, whether you're a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent is the economy. And he laid out perhaps the most comprehensive economic plan that we've ever had a presidential candidate. And I - I called him afterwards and I said, "I think you just won the election with that speech." Because when he had an opportunity to talk about how he was going to lower inflation, cut taxes, including no tax on tips, no tax on social security, what - what he's talking about doing in terms of controlling the border, because that affects labor prices, housing

cost, interest rates, smart tariffs, pro-American, pro-growth. This is something that's going to lift up everybody. And I think, again, the economy's going to be the deciding factor of this election.

KRISTEN WELKER:

So very quickly, stay away from personal attacks, do you think, Governor?

GOV. DOUG BURGUM:

Well, I think when he stays on the issues - policies - absolutely those are - those are the winning issues. Because again, whether it's crime, whether it's the border, whether it's Israel, whether it's wars abroad, President Trump has got not only the record of having served as president and accomplishing, you know, peace in the world and prosperity at home, but he's also got policies right now that make a ton of sense -

KRISTEN WELKER:

Let -

GOV. DOUG BURGUM:

- for every American.

KRISTEN WELKER:

Let's talk about his policies. I want to ask you about some of his comments this week at the New York Economic Club. He was asked what legislation he would support to deal with the high cost of child care, to make it more affordable. He seemed to suggest he would pay for child care by imposing robust tariffs. Is that your understanding? Can you help us understand what exactly was he proposing?

GOV. DOUG BURGUM:

Well, I think it came near the end of his speech. And when he was talking about the opportunity we would have with energy abundance and energy dominance as a country, just like some states have and just like some countries. You take a look at Norway, you take a look at the - some of the countries in the Middle East who've built up huge sovereign wealth funds off of their energy. We - we have - we have states in America - Alaska, Wyoming, Texas, New Mexico, North Dakota - just those five states alone have built up over \$330 billion of endowment funds because of the way they've managed energy in those states. So, he was envisioning that if we have energy

dominance, we sell energy to our friends and allies, we build up endowment funds, and then you can help pay for the cost of things that Americans need just like we do in - in our state.

KRISTEN WELKER:

Well, and just to be clear, he was asked about how he would pay for child care, he invoked tariffs. The person who asked him the question said his answer was insulting to parents because it sent the message that child care expenses are no big deal. Was he specifically saying that tariffs would pay for child care? And I guess a lot of people wonder, how do the two relate?

GOV. DOUG BURGUM:

Well, I think that first of all, dollars are fungible. And so if we've got dollars coming into the federal government, that's coming from smart tariffs, where we're going for equal and fair trade. Because President Trump really began his negotiations with other countries on Thursday. If you're going to tariff U.S. goods coming into your country, we're going to tariff yours. And so that's how we end up with free - free trade. But I - I think, again, he has - when he was in office, you know, he doubled the - the child tax credit, which again was a big lift for families and it helped lower child poverty in the United States. So he's shown that he knows and understands that. And he certainly understands how inflation is hurting every American today. And one of the things that's - that has gone up in price is child care. We know that from the work in our own state.

KRISTEN WELKER:

Well, Governor, let me ask you, because I hear you making the case for tariffs. But if you look at your state, soybean farmers took a real hit when Donald Trump imposed his tariffs during his administration. They lost 70% of their market. Do you believe - are you making the case given that that robust tariffs would be good for soybean farmers in your state? And what would you say to those who say they've been decimated?

GOV. DOUG BURGUM:

Well, what - what would be good for soybean farmers in our state is that we actually add value to that product before we ship it overseas. Because when I took office eight years ago, we had zero processing plants for soybeans in our state. We've got two - two that have been completed, a third one that's under construction, which will take care of about 75% of our crop. And this fits right in with President Trump's policies, which is "let's bring manufacturing and processing back to the United States, as opposed to us being like a colony where we just ship raw corn, raw

soybeans to China. Add value here.” That creates job, it creates additional economic value in our states and in our country.

KRISTEN WELKER:

Alright. Let me ask you about something that former President Trump posted on social media overnight. He seemed to be escalating his threats against political opponents. Let me read you what he said. He said, quote, "When I win, those people that cheated will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. Please beware that this legal exposure extends to lawyers, political operatives, donors, illegal voters, and corrupt election officials." We should note, there is absolutely no evidence that election workers have done anything corrupt. But do you think that it is appropriate to be threatening election workers in this way before the election?

GOV. DOUG BURGUM:

Well, I think it speaks to a concern that Americans have. And as we've talked about on this program before, we don't just have one election in this country. We've got elections that go across over 3,000 counties, and many of those counties have different rules. And so again, I think what President Trump is saying, we're going to have free and fair elections, everybody's got to follow the rules. And just putting people on notice that - and I think this could have been a statement that could've come from the Harris campaign as well because everybody's concerned in this country about making sure that our elections are free and fair.

KRISTEN WELKER:

Well, Governor, a lot of those concerns you mentioned are being fueled by these types of statements by former President Trump. But going back to the substance of what he said, he seems to be threatening these political operatives, donors, and election officials. Is that appropriate in any scenario, Governor?

GOV. DOUG BURGUM:

Well, I think what's appropriate is that we keep working hard as a country to make sure that we've got a belief in our elections and a trust in our elections. We've got some states that remarkably have just now this year cleaned up their voter rolls and eliminating people that no longer live in the state, people that are no longer alive. And when you're talking about states taking millions of people off the voter rolls, I mean, this is just common sense database clean-up. I've spent 30 years in tech. I mean, you can't run a company if your customer database is completely out of date and has people that no longer are your customers, but you're still

providing - still sending them a ballot, in this case. And so I think there's a number of basic things that we can all agree on that would make sure that the elections are free and fair.

KRISTEN WELKER:

And again, I hear what you're saying about the voter roll. It's important to point out, of course, there was no widespread fraud found in the 2020 election. It was deemed to be one of the safest and most secure in U.S. history. But let me ask you about the news coming from one branch of the Republican Party, former Congresswoman Liz Cheney, and her father, former Vice President Dick Cheney, coming out saying they are going to vote for Kamala Harris. Here's the statement from Dick Cheney. He said, quote, "He tried to steal the last election using lies and violence to keep himself in power after the voters had rejected him. He can never be trusted with power again." What do you say, Governor, to undecided voters who might be swayed by that argument?

GOV. DOUG BURGUM:

Well, I don't know that any of the undecideds will be swayed because I think it's been pretty well understood that former Vice President Cheney is, you know, not a fan of President Trump. But I think - you know - I - I know you've got Senator Bernie **Sanders** coming on next. I think that'd be a great question for him because we -

KRISTEN WELKER:

I'll ask him.

GOV. DOUG BURGUM:

You could ask him. Because I mean, you know, this is - this is, you know, Darth Cheney, I think. You know, "genocidal war criminal" is what Democrats were calling him for decades, and now overnight they're embracing him. So I guess I'm just wondering if, you know, maybe he'll be on the campaign trail, campaigning with Senator **Sanders**. I mean, this is a season - season for odd couples.

KRISTEN WELKER:

Well, you know what? You took one of my questions out of my mouth. Coming up we're going to get to that with Senator **Sanders**. Governor Burgum, thank you so much for being here.

GOV. DOUG BURGUM:

Thank you, Kristen.

KRISTEN WELKER:

Really appreciate it. Great to see as always. And when we come back, Independent Senator Bernie **Sanders** of Vermont joins me next.

KRISTEN WELKER:

Welcome back. And joining me now is independent Senator Bernie **Sanders** of Vermont. Senator **Sanders**, welcome back to Meet the Press.

SEN. BERNIE SANDERS:

My pleasure.

KRISTEN WELKER:

Well, it's great to have you here. I do want to dive in by talking about the economy, likely to be one of the big topics at Tuesday night's debate. This week, of course, as you know, Vice President Kamala Harris unveiled more of her economic policies, which included a 28% capital gains tax for top earners. It really marks a big break from President Biden, who has proposed a 40% tax on top earners. Of course, when you were running for president, you proposed a near-60% tax on top income earners. Do you believe that this particular policy position is a mistake by Vice President Harris?

SEN. BERNIE SANDERS:

Well, look, this is what I believe, Kristen. We live in a nation today that has more income and wealth inequality than has ever existed in the history of the United States. People on top, the billionaire class, doing phenomenally well. Sixty percent of Americans are living paycheck-to-paycheck. Gap between the rich and the poor growing wider. What I believe is that we've got to take on the greed of the billionaire class and say, "Yes, you know what, guys? When we've got 600,000 people sleeping out on the streets, when people can't afford to send their kids to college. You know what? You are going to start paying your fair share of taxes." So I think dealing with the massive level of income and wealth inequality through a progressive tax system is exactly what we've got to do.

KRISTEN WELKER:

So do you believe that 28% is enough? Or should she come up? Should she boost that number?

SEN. BERNIE SANDERS:

I would go higher than that. Look, when you've got three people on top owning more wealth than the bottom half of American society, and when billionaires pay an effective tax rate lower than truck drivers or nurses, yeah, you could substantially raise taxes on the billionaire class and the people on top. But Kristen, it's not only the need for real progressive tax reform. What we have got to address is that while there have been important gains economically under President Biden and Vice President Harris, much more needs to be done. People cannot afford the high cost of health care. Elderly people can't afford dental care, despite being on Medicare. So I think what the vice president needs is a strong agenda that speaks to working people that says, "You know what? At a time of so much inequality, we are on the side of working families, and we're prepared to take on the big money interests who today have so much political and economic power in our country."

KRISTEN WELKER:

Well, let me ask you about some of her ties to big business. Top Silicon Valley companies and big-name venture capitalists have reportedly been in close communication with the Harris campaign. I'm talking about Mark Cuban, LinkedIn co-founder Reid Hoffman. From a practical standpoint, a lot of her supporters argue those ties might make sense. She's been accused of being too liberal, for example, by Republicans. Are you concerned at all about the ties to those big names, those top earners?

SEN. BERNIE SANDERS:

Well, Kristen what you're really touching on is maybe the most important issue, and that is, whether you're a Democrat, Republican or independent, you should be concerned about this impact of the disastrous Supreme Court decision on Citizens United that today allows billionaires, whether they're Elon Musk in the Republicans or whether they are Democratic billionaires, to play a very, very outsized role in the political process. Look, you have one vote, the average American has one vote, but billionaires could start a super PAC and put hundreds of millions of dollars - tens of millions of dollars - into defeating the people they don't like and supporting the people they do like. That is not democracy. That is oligarchy. And I would hope that every American, regardless of your political persuasion, says, "We got to get rid of the Citizens United and return to a nation where one person has one vote, and that's democracy. Not billions buying elections." If your question is, am I concerned about billionaire influence over the Democratic Party? I surely am, just as I am over the Republican Party.

KRISTEN WELKER:

Let me zoom out a little bit. You have described Vice President Kamala Harris as a progressive. She has previously supported Medicare for All, now she does not. She's previously supported a ban on fracking, now she does not. These, Senator, are ideas that you have campaigned on. Do you think that she is abandoning her progressive ideals?

SEN. BERNIE SANDERS:

No, I don't think she's abandoning her ideals. I think she's trying to be pragmatic and doing what she thinks is right in order to win the election. My own view is slightly different. I think that in America today, there are a lot of people, rural people, working class people, who no longer believe that the United States Congress and government represents their interests - too dominated by big money interests. So I think that there is something wrong, personally, when we are the only major country on earth not to guarantee health care to all of our people, despite spending twice as much per capita. That is why I support Medicare for All. She does not. She has another approach toward moving toward universal health care. But again, I think on issues like expanding Medicare, by expanding social security and lifting the cap on taxable income that the rich put in so we can raise social security benefits, the need to raise the minimum wage from a starvation \$7.25 minimum wage to a living wage - I think if you campaign on those issues, raising taxes on billionaires, you know what? She's going to win. And I think she could win big.

KRISTEN WELKER:

Well, let me just ask you, then, big picture. Do you still consider Vice President Kamala Harris to be progressive, Senator?

SEN. BERNIE SANDERS:

I do. Look, she and I - she is not where I am. But I think, for example, when she talks about making the child tax credit permanent, and you know we did that in the American Rescue Plan, we lowered childhood poverty by 40%. Kristen, we should not have, as the richest country on earth, one of the highest rates in childhood poverty in the world. When she talks about building 3 million units of affordable housing, that's a big deal because we have a major housing crisis in America. You know, when she talks about passing the PRO Act to make it easier for workers to join unions, that's a big deal because we have to expand the union movement so that workers get decent wages. So yes, her views are not mine, but I do consider her progressive.

KRISTEN WELKER:

Senator, before I let you go I do have to ask you about her recent endorsements by two people who are not progressives at all. Of course, I'm talking about Dick and Liz Cheney. This week they said they're going to support her, they're going to vote for her. It's worth noting former Congresswoman Cheney voted with former President Trump more than 90% of the time, was quite critical when President Biden picked her as his running mate. Would you welcome seeing Liz Cheney out on the campaign trail?

SEN. BERNIE SANDERS:

Well, Kristen, what I think Dick and Liz Cheney are saying is that in this existential moment in American history, it's not just issues. Cheney and I agree on nothing, no issues. But what we do believe in is that the United States should retain its democratic foundations. And it's not just Cheney. I think there is a significant number of Republicans who say, "Well, you know, I may not agree with the vice president on this issue or that issue, but I cannot support somebody who is a pathological liar, somebody who fomented an insurrection to overthrow the election returns." So I applaud the Cheneys for their courage in defending democracy. Obviously, on all the issues we have very different points of view.

KRISTEN WELKER:

All right. Senator Bernie **Sanders**, we covered a lot of ground. Thank you so much for being here on this Sunday. We appreciate it. And when we come back, 50 years ago today, President Gerald Ford pardoned Richard Nixon. How Democrats responded in our Meet the Press Minute. That's next.

KRISTEN WELKER:

Welcome back. Fifty years ago today, President Gerald Ford granted a "full, free, and absolute pardon" to his predecessor, Richard Nixon. In a televised address exactly one month after Nixon's resignation over the Watergate Scandal, Ford explained that the blanket pardon would cover any crimes Nixon might have committed during his presidency. Democratic Senator Edmund Muskie joined Meet the Press an hour after Ford's announcement. Look.

[START TAPE]

SEN. EDMUND MUSKIE:

The crimes in which the president may or may not have been involved, the crimes that are made serious, particularly because they involved the presidential office. There are no comparable crimes. I mean, if indeed he was guilty of some of the things with which his associates have been

charged, it represents a breach of political responsibility and public trust of the highest order. There is nothing higher than the American political system. And it's for that reason that we must pinpoint the responsibility for them.

[END TAPE]

KRISTEN WELKER:

When we come back, what do Vice President Harris and former President Trump need to do to accomplish on the debate stage, Tuesday night? Our panel is next.

KRISTEN WELKER:

Welcome back. The panel is here. NBC News Washington correspondent Yamiche Alcindor; Lauren Mayk, political reporter for NBC 10 Philadelphia; Ashley Etienne, former communications director for Vice President Kamala Harris; and Republican strategist Sara Fagen. Thanks to all of you for being here. Yamiche, I'm going to start with you. Set the stage. You have been all over the reporting of what is happening inside debate prep, inside Harrisworld. Tell us what you have.

YAMICHE ALCINDOR:

Well, sources who are familiar with how Vice President Harris is preparing for the debate tell me she is diligently getting ready for this by going to a hotel in Pittsburgh, spending hours doing mock debates, including with an aide who is dressing like former President Donald Trump, an aide who also did the same role for Hillary Clinton in 2016. I'm also told that she has a number of missions here, with this debate. The first is she really wants to make sure that Americans who, maybe, are undecided or who don't know her backstory, that they really walk away understanding her policy stances, but also who she is, her biography. Also, I'm told, Vice President Harris wants to make sure she needles Donald Trump and that she really gets him to lash out, possibly. But also, she wants to expose the flaws that she sees in him, which she believes are that he lies profusely but also that he stumbles, that he mumbles, that he mixes up information. And she also wants to make sure that she doesn't get pulled into any personal attacks that he might lob on her. She really wants to make sure she stays calm and really thinks about sort of what she wants to get across to the American people. I'm also told that there are some people who are worried that she might be over-preparing. But they really - her aides don't want to underestimate Donald Trump and want to avoid a 2019 moment, where Tulsi Gabbard was able to have a really extended attack on her prosecutorial record. She wants to avoid a moment like that and really wants to be ready for all attacks.

KRISTEN WELKER:

Sara, no one would accuse former President Donald Trump of over-preparing. He's having what are called policy discussions. And he said, you know, his preparation's out on the campaign trail. What are you anticipating? And Yamiche set the stage for what Harris needs to do. What does former President Trump need to do? What are you anticipating?

SARA FAGEN:

I think the most important thing is to not take the bait. I mean, the Harris campaign has widely broadcast that their strategy is to get under his skin and to prod him into saying something that is either insulting or sexist toward her, which I think would be a disaster for him. He needs to do what he did in the debate with Joe Biden, which he was very calm during that debate. He talked about policy. He drew a contrast. I think the other thing he really needs to accomplish in this debate is to make the point and ask the question about which Kamala Harris is going to show up to the presidency if she wins. Is it the one who campaigned in 2019 with very progressive policies, decriminalizing immigration, fracking - which I know she's changed her position on - banning fracking, censorship, all manner of things? Or is it the one that's been on the campaign trail for the last 30 days?

KRISTEN WELKER:

Well, and that is undoubtedly, she'll get a lot of questions about that, Ashley. How she answers them could determine how well she does. This was the advice from former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who said this to Vice President Harris in an interview, quote, "She just should not be baited. She should bait him." This is part of what Yamiche was getting at. "He can be rattled. He doesn't know how to respond to substantive direct attacks. And I think that, from her prosecutorial background, I think that's what she will be equipped to do." What do you make of that? What do you think she's going to do, as someone who knows her very well?

ASHLEY ETIENNE:

Yeah. I mean, I think the former secretary is absolutely right. To some degree, I think she's going to strategically needle him and force him to take her bait. But I really think the most important thing that she needs to do is really three things. One, which is get out of Donald Trump's way. He's going to be bombastic, petty, and small. Let him be all of those things. You don't even have to needle him to do that. That's just who he is. That's why the pressure's on him. It's because he can't be that person anymore. Remember, the last debate, he actually - That was Joe Biden's worst night of his political career and Donald Trump walked away with no significant bump in the actual polls. The second thing that I think she has to do is lay out a vision. Her most

important audience is going to be those people who don't know her, those independent voters, those disaffected Republicans who are going to want to see her vision for the future. That's her greatest contrast against Donald Trump. And I think the third thing she's going to have to do, something that we've not seen moderators do yet, and that is hold him accountable to his record. He oversaw the worst economy in modern history. She's got to remind people of that because, again, that's going to be the greatest contrast between her and him.

KRISTEN WELKER:

Yeah. Will she be quick on her feet and fact check? Lauren, that takes me to you. You are in the center of the action. You are here from Philadelphia. Set the stage for us. Ashley's talking about those disaffected voters. Of course, you cover them in the suburbs of Pennsylvania; people who are maybe not so sure, people are still undecided. How closely are Philadelphians watching all of this unfold - and Pennsylvanians?

LAUREN MAYK:

Yeah. Well, Kristen, they're watching and looking ahead to the debate. Although, I will tell you one voter told me, this past week, she is exhausted for watching -

KRISTEN WELKER:

Already?

LAUREN MAYK:

- all of the changes that have happened over the past couple of months. But one of the things that I have heard from some voters is that they are looking for specifics in this debate. They want to know what these candidates are going to do and how it will affect them. One voter told me, "I think I know their ideas. I want to know their policies," even saying, "I want to know how they're going to get it through Congress," which is a pretty high bar there, looking for in a debate. Another voter, though, told me, this past week, she had been undecided. We've been keeping track of her. She told me, this past week, she'll be voting for former President Trump, but she's not sure if he will win. So she wants to know and see how Kamala Harris will handle herself on the debate stage. And she's really hoping that both of them can get their messages across so that voters have something substantial to make their decisions on.

KRISTEN WELKER:

It's so fascinating, always, to hear what voters are saying, particularly in a battleground state like Pennsylvania, which could decide the whole, entire thing. Sara, Vice President Harris comes into this debate on Tuesday night with some momentum, some new endorsements from Liz Cheney, from Dick Cheney. What do you make of this announcement? Does it matter? Do these endorsements carry weight? And will they win over some undecideds?

SARA FAGEN:

I don't think any given one endorsement matters that much. I think, though, and there's a lot of - there's no love lost between these families for a long time. Remember, Donald Trump said Dick Cheney lied about Iraq. He is the primary reason Liz Cheney lost her House race. So, you know, one endorsement, no. But the broader cumulative challenge for Trump is that even after she dropped out of the primary, Nikki Haley was garnering 15% to 20% of the Republican vote. He needs to draw those folks back into the fold if he is going to win this election. So this new story about the Cheneys doesn't help with that.

KRISTEN WELKER:

Well, Lauren, in a place like the Philly suburbs, do you think it could carry some weight, where you have those traditional Republicans, those Bush and Cheney, and Romney Republicans, who still do pay attention to what they are saying?

LAUREN MAYK:

Well, certainly, there are some Republicans in the Philadelphia suburbs who are voting for Kamala Harris. I know some of them. But there's another twist in Pennsylvania that strikes me about this, is that Pennsylvanians also have someone else who they can point to who's making a different decision, which would be former Republican Senator Pat Toomey, who has said that he's not voting for Donald Trump but he's not endorsing Kamala Harris. He has indicated it is not a binary choice for him. So that is a different decision. And they can look at that. So if endorsements swayed those Nikki Haley voters, you mentioned Nikki Haley is endorsing Donald Trump.

KRISTEN WELKER:

Yeah. Such a fascinating point. Yamiche, you've got some exclusive reporting on a new endorsement for Kamala Harris.

YAMICHE ALCINDOR:

That's right. Khizr Khan, who is a man whose son, an army captain, died while fighting in Iraq. He is coming out and endorsing Vice President Kamala Harris, saying that he's going to be a campaign surrogate. Now, he garnered a lot of attention because in 2015, he delivered what really was a biting speech at the DNC attacking Donald Trump. He told me now that he thinks that Donald Trump has gotten worse. He also believes that he would be a dictator, if elected. He sees Vice President Harris as a uniter. So he's very much excited to get his voice out and to make the case for her.

KRISTEN WELKER:

Ashley, do you expect to see, whether it's Mr. Khan or the Cheneys, you think they'll be out on the campaign trail?

ASHLEY ETIENNE:

Absolutely. But I think the most important thing is the GOP, now, is in total panic mode. Kamala Harris is trending up in the polls. She's out-fundraising him by more than \$100 million. There's been talk, this week, about a strategy to dump Trump because, consistently, the MAGA movement and Trump has been underperforming.

SARA FAGEN:

There's no conversation about that. And, actually, the swing states have closed.

KRISTEN WELKER:

Yeah. Okay. Great conversation, guys. Thank you very much. Before we go, we do have a programming note. Tune into NBC and NBC News now for special coverage of the presidential debate on Tuesday night, with full coverage beginning at 8:00 p.m. Eastern. And that is all for today. Thank you so much for watching. We will be back next week because, if it's Sunday, it's Meet the Press. 