

Politics

Harris Taps Minnesota's Walz in Appeal to Blue-Collar Workers

- Nominee had little time to settle on pick after Biden exit
- Harris expected to appear with Walz at rally in Philadelphia



Tim Walz *Photographer: Nicole Neri/Bloomberg*

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Vice President Kamala Harris tapped Minnesota Governor Tim Walz as her running mate, enlisting him to build a coastal and Midwestern electoral coalition to block Donald Trump from returning to the White House.

“Tim is a battle-tested leader who has an incredible track record of getting things done for Minnesota families,” Harris wrote in a text message sent to supporters Tuesday. “I know that he will bring that same principled leadership to our campaign, and to the office of the vice president.”

The pick hews to the conventional wisdom of ticket-balancing, complementing Harris – who hails from California and is seeking to become the first Black woman president in US history – across demographic, cultural and political lines.

“Vice President Harris is showing us the politics of what’s possible. It reminds me a bit of the first day of school,” Walz, a former school teacher, posted on social media.

Harris is expected to appear alongside Walz at a rally later Tuesday in Philadelphia. She called Walz in the morning and was set to speak with other finalists, who also include Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro and Senator Mark Kelly of Arizona.

Walz, 60, is less known nationally but popular in his home state, especially among the 91% of Democratic voters who approve of his job performance – the third-highest of any state, according to a July Morning Consult poll.

Harris selected Walz for his experience as a governor, and appreciated his record that included child tax credits and paid leave for middle class families, according to a person familiar with the decision. She also picked him for his ability to relate to Midwest voters and because of a strong personal rapport between them, the person said.

Harris had little time to settle on a vice presidential pick after President Joe Biden’s exit from the race. Polls show a tight race. A July Bloomberg News/Morning Consult survey found Harris has wiped out Trump’s lead among voters in seven battleground states with the Democrat now ahead 48% to 47% – a statistical dead heat.

The decision to pick Walz was first reported by CNN.

Centrist Democrat

A native of rural Nebraska, Walz joined the Army National Guard and rose to the rank of command sergeant major, serving during the early years of the global War on Terror. He worked as a teacher – on a Native American reservation and in China – before finally settling down in Minnesota and running for Congress.

He served six terms in the House, where he focused on military, veterans and agricultural issues – allowing him to neutralize Harris' relative lack of experience in those areas and deliver a message that might resonate with voters outside the Democratic base. His voting record was slightly to the right of the typical House Democrat.

One issue where he differed from Democrats was over gun rights, where his lifelong devotion to shooting sports and voting record earned him an endorsement from the National Rifle Association. But after a 2018 school shooting in Parkland, Florida, Walz called the NRA “the biggest single obstacle to passing the most basic measures to prevent gun violence in America.” He says he supports universal background checks, “red flag” laws and an assault weapons ban.

Now serving his second term as governor, Walz presided over the upheaval that followed the 2020 murder of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer. After initial criticism that he was slow to respond, Walz called up the National Guard and summoned two special sessions of the state legislature to pass police reform legislation.

As Harris weighed her choices, Walz was pushed by progressives and labor-union leaders who touted his policies as governor, including offering free school lunches, expanding paid family and medical leave – a background Democrats hope will appeal to voters in an election in which the economy is a defining issue.

The governor's image as a plain talker also helped bolster his standing. Walz mocked Trump and Republican policies as “weird,” an insult that became a rallying cry for Democrats.

Walz was also championed by lawmakers he served with in the House. Former Speaker Nancy Pelosi praised the selection on Tuesday.

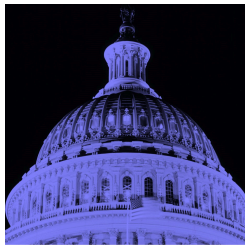
“He brings the security credential, he brings the rural credential and he will do well in rural America,” Pelosi said on MSNBC.

Minnesota Economy

Walz will be critical to Democratic messaging in battleground states where their prospects hinge partly on the ability to appeal to White, working-class voters dismayed by Biden’s handling of the economy.

Voter anxiety over high inflation and concerns about rank-and-file union workers about the impact Biden’s transition to clean energy, particularly electric vehicles, will have on jobs and wages threaten to weigh down the Democratic ticket.

Trump’s running mate, Senator JD Vance of Ohio, brings a populist worldview and a message Republicans believe will help them make further inroads among blue-collar workers.



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Walz’s own record in Minnesota will be under scrutiny. Minnesota was among the few states that saw a drop in gross domestic product growth in the first quarter after tepid expansion in 2023. The state has an aging population and has struggled to attract workers over the past two decades. Its total labor force is projected to remain essentially flat this decade, inhibiting job creation and GDP growth, according to the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce. The unemployment rate of 2.9% in June, though, was one of the lowest in the US.

The state has been a reliable source of Democratic electoral votes, going blue in every election since Richard Nixon last won it for Republicans in 1972. That’s the longest Democratic winning streak outside of the District of Columbia. Republicans had identified the North Star state as a top opportunity for Trump ahead of Walz’s selection.

The governor's support among progressives and his record as governor, though, will amplify Republican attacks that the Democratic ticket is too liberal for American voters.

“Just like Kamala Harris, Tim Walz is a dangerously liberal extremist,” Trump's campaign said in a statement.

– *With assistance from Mark Niquette, Akayla Gardner, and Hadriana Lowenkron*

(Adds Walz statement in the fourth paragraph, details on selection in the seventh paragraph)

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