

E24 Instant Insight: Harris Selects Minnesota Governor Tim Walz as Running Mate

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Key Takeaways

- **Appeal:** Minnesota Governor Tim Walz is a popular figure in his midwestern state – despite being relatively unknown at the national level – who has a track record of progressive policy wins. Vice President Kamala Harris likely saw Walz’s “everyman” appeal as differentiating him from career politicians and resonating with both progressives and blue-collar voters.
- **Views on China:** Despite his personal connection to China as one of the first American educators to teach there during the “Reform and Opening” period, Walz has been critical of China’s unfair trade practices and Beijing’s human rights record.
- **Views on Trade:** Walz’s record on trade is mixed, combining openness toward a handful of countries (including Japan and South Korea) with protectionist tendencies stemming from his pro-labor sympathies. As a congressman, Walz favored expanding export markets for agricultural goods but otherwise expressed skepticism about several multilateral trade agreements, including the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).
- **Potential Impact in Office:** Combined with his experience as both a governor and member of Congress, Walz’s facility with bipartisan negotiation and his general appeal to both moderates and progressives could make him an effective liaison between the White House, Congress, and state governors, especially on domestic initiatives.

Biography

Tim Walz was elected Governor of Minnesota in 2018 and easily won reelection in 2022. A relative newcomer to the national stage, Walz was born in rural Nebraska and enlisted in the Army National Guard, serving for 24 years and retiring as a Command Sergeant Major in 2005. Walz worked as a social studies teacher and coached high school football before running for the House of Representatives in 2006, winning an upset victory against a six-term incumbent in a Republican



district. Walz served for six terms until he became governor in 2019. While in the House, he sat on the Agriculture, Veterans' Affairs (as ranking member), and Armed Services committees. He also served on the Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC), which monitors China's human rights record.

During his governorship, Walz worked with a divided government to negotiate the state's budget in 2019. Political tensions flared in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic and Black Lives Matter protests, and Walz received criticism for his response to the riots in Minneapolis. Nevertheless, he was reelected in 2022 – a victory which coincided with Democratic control over the state legislature, [enabling](#) the passage of progressive policies on education, abortion, clean energy, gun control, legalized marijuana, voting rights, and paid leave. Walz's legislative successes resulted in his chairmanship of the Democratic Governors Association and co-chairmanship of the Democratic National Convention's Rules Committee.

Why Did Harris Pick Him?

Harris's selection of Tim Walz reflects the vice president's goal of seeking a governing partner with executive experience and appeal to broad swaths of the Democratic Party. Walz also does not face intense opposition from some quarters of the party like Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro – who has been criticized for his pro-Israel stances on the Israel-Gaza War and support of Republican-backed policies like school voucher programs. Harris likely views Walz's "everyman" appeal as differentiating him from career politicians, with several elements of his background potentially appealing to blue-collar voters.

Walz's electoral record as governor and as a six-term congressman in a formerly Republican district further underscores his popularity with diverse audiences. Walz is generally liked across the Democratic Party; his selection drew strong praise from progressive Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, moderate Senator Michael Bennett, and Democrat-turned-independent Senator Joe Manchin. Former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi referred to Walz as "right down the middle... a heartland of America Democrat." Additionally, Walz's service in Congress for twelve years and his relatively bipartisan behavior during his tenure could make him a useful legislative liaison, even if Republicans hold a congressional majority.

Walz's Asia Policy Perspectives

Walz's positions on key issues in the Indo-Pacific are hard to pinpoint given his somewhat limited exposure to Asia – not to mention foreign policy decisionmaking



in general. Accordingly, his influence on Indo-Pacific policies within a Harris administration will likely be limited.

Walz's experiences with the region are largely personal rather than political. His most significant touchpoint with Asia is China. During the 1980s, Walz taught English in China, becoming one of the first sanctioned American educators to visit the country during its "Opening and Reform" era. He also brought his wife to China during their honeymoon, and in 1994, they set up a business together which arranged exchange visits to China for high school students until 2003. In his role as governor, Walz made an official trip to South Korea and Japan during 2019 and again to Japan in 2023 to promote Minnesotan businesses.

Throughout his political career, Walz prioritized addressing domestic issues including healthcare, energy, education, agriculture, welfare, and transportation. While serving in the House from 2007 to 2019, he made a handful of statements on key foreign policy matters expressing opposition to multilateral free trade agreements and armed conflict or adventurism – although he is a staunch proponent of upholding human rights.

- **China:** Despite his personal connection to the country, Walz's position on China appears aligned with the current administration's view on the competitive nature of the relationship. Walz is one of the few U.S. lawmakers to meet with the Dalai Lama, and while on the CECC, he did not shy away from criticizing Beijing's human rights record and co-sponsoring resolutions condemning China's censorship of the Tiananmen Square incident. Separately, Walz opposed the Trump administration's trade war, arguing that widespread tariffs were hurting U.S. farmers. Finally, he openly criticized China's trade practices, calling them "an unfair system that gives advantages one way."
- **Trade:** Walz's record on trade is mixed, combining openness toward a handful of countries with some protectionist tendencies stemming from his pro-labor sympathies. While in Congress, Walz favored expanding export markets for agricultural goods but otherwise expressed skepticism toward multilateral trade partnerships, including the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and free trade agreements (FTAs) with Peru, Colombia, and Panama. However, Walz did vote in favor of the U.S.-Korea FTA (KORUS) in 2011, praising the agreement as an "exciting prospect" for Minnesotan businesses, and has touted investments by South Korean and Japanese companies in Minnesota as governor.



- **Technology and Innovation:** Walz has struck a delicate balance between big tech and tech-skeptic progressives, supporting state investment in emerging technology while also spearheading legislation on better protection for data privacy and workers' rights in the tech industry. Walz earmarked over USD 500 million for state technology programs and was one of just 19 U.S. governors to pass data protection laws. He also banned the use of "deepfakes" to influence state elections last year. While Walz has not commented extensively on the CHIPS Act, Inflation Reduction Act, and other measures to attract foreign investment in advanced and green technology sectors, his track record seems to align with the spirit of those policies.
- **Military Intervention:** In 2006, Walz ran his first congressional race on an anti-war platform that criticized the Iraq War. In 2007, he voted to withdraw troops from Iraq, and in a notable break from the Obama administration, opposed military action in Syria in 2013. He was also a co-sponsor of a House resolution in 2017 that called upon the president to withdraw U.S. military personnel from the Saudi-led coalition intervening in the Yemeni civil war. One notable exception was Walz's support for NATO intervention in Libya.

Impact in a Harris Administration?

The available evidence suggests that Walz's and Harris' beliefs – particularly on progressive agenda items such as labor rights and climate change – are aligned. Walz is therefore likely to amplify Harris' policy agenda, with the two seeing eye-to-eye on many key issues. Perhaps the most important skill Walz can offer Harris is his facility with bipartisan negotiation and general appeal to moderates and progressives alike. When combined with his experience as both a governor and a congressman, those traits could make Walz an effective liaison between the White House, Congress, and governors, especially on domestic initiatives.

This report was prepared by A'ndre Gonawela and Nick Ackert.