

The Tree Frog, the Toad and the Chameleon



*A Purple
Parable of our
Times*



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Episode 4: The New VP Candidates

In the garden, the party with the incumbent president has its nominating convention second. So, in 2024 the Red Party convention was held first. At the time, Big Donnie had a strong lead in the polls, which was fueled by Uncle Joey's disastrous physical and cognitive performance in their initial debate two months earlier. After considering some other more experienced candidates for vice president, Big Donnie settled on a young senator called Van who came from a hardscrabble background, attended an elite university law school and worked for a time as a venture capitalist before being elected to the upper house of the Convocation only two years earlier. He had written a heartfelt book about his difficult earlier life that became a best seller and a movie. Although he was a toad like Big Donnie, he had some tree frog talent from somewhere. Interestingly, he was married to an Indian tree frog.

Big Donnie liked Van. He could be a showman, but he was loyal and would never overshadow Big Donnie. He would appeal to the swing state voters. With the election looking better and better, he would be a solid candidate to carry Big Donnie's "Make the Garden Great Again" culture forward to the next generation.

The media ravens immediately criticized the choice, claiming Van was just an understudy of Big Donnie's "MGGA" culture (often pronounced "MAGA"). Some even called him a parrot toad because he mimicked Big Donnie so well. The ravens parsed every comment Van ever made and used them to tarnish his reputation. Van had a rough start with the campaign, dropping some foolish soundbites that the media ravens amplified and used against him. Still, he looked like a good choice to tackle Kammy in the vice-presidential debates.

Everything changed when the doors blew off and Kammy became the Blue Party's presidential nominee. All bets were off. Kammy moved up in the polls and Van had no idea who Kammy's vice-presidential pick—and Van's opponent—might be.

Once Uncle Joey agreed not to run again, Kammy immediately turned to the selection of her VP. Time was short, as the Blue Party convention was only weeks away. Despite the lack of an effective Blue Party primary, she had some strong choices from swing states. After she was close to her selection, the tree frogs on the far-left branches of the Great Tree objected to some of the potential picks. With little time left, Kammy pivoted to a lesser-known governor named Walls—or Coach Walls as the campaign would sometimes call him.

Walls was an interesting selection. He was a folksy toad from the Midwest who had been a teacher and a high school coach before he got into politics. He served in the lower house of the Grand Convocation as a popular Blue Party representative from a traditionally Red Party area. After he was elected governor and gained a Blue Party legislature, he became significantly more progressive. He was in the National Guard for many years. Although Walls was only a year older than Kammy, he looked much older. Kammy did not miss the fact that he made her look much younger—all the better to appeal to her new TikTok fans and contrast her with Big Donnie.

To some, Walls was a walking contradiction. To Kammy, he was a canvas she could paint as she liked, much as she was using her own talents as a chameleon to portray herself as she wanted the different groups of garden voters to see. Walls was also unlikely to threaten or overshadow her. His almost complete lack of international experience and minimal financial assets made Kammy look rather worldly and successful by comparison.

To the Blue Party voters, especially those on the far-left branches of the Great Tree, Kammy would make Walls appear to be the dedicated progressive he had proven to be during his recent years as governor. But to the Red Party voters, most of the independents and many of the Blue Party voters who were in danger of crossing over to Big Donnie, she would make Walls appear to be a kindly grandfather who was once a teacher and a coach, a man who grew up in the Midwest and spent his career serving others, a man with years of military service who once received the highest rating from the NRA, a man of modest means rather than capitalist wealth (albeit provided almost entirely by government salaries and pensions). Perhaps best of all, Walls could portray either role, playing the humble servant or a tough attack dog, as the need might be.

Just as Kammy expected the raven media to cover her own flexible portrayal of her current and earlier political positions, she knew they would do little to expose Walls' true political leanings. The media ravens understood the importance of applying a double standard to their investigative reporting and news stories as well as their Op/Eds and editorials. They would dig deep into every comment that Big Donnie and Van ever made and remind their readers daily about the continued evidence in those words of bias, discrimination,

rudeness, misinformation or inconsistency with contemporary standards of decency and political/cultural correctness. But the media ravens would never apply the same energy, interest or coverage to the content, consistency or current implications of earlier comments made by Walls or her.

Kammy's one fear was that Big Donnie or Van would have the discipline to reset the election conversation to the issues that the voters in the garden really cared about. Issues like the economy and immigration. She had three strategies to deal with this. Her first strategy was distraction. With plenty of help from the media ravens, she and Walls would continually bait Big Donnie and Van with questions about foolish, insulting or incorrect things they had said. History showed they would bite and forget about whatever substantive issues they were supposed to be talking about.

Her second strategy involved generalities. She and Walls would have enough happy, positive sound bites to appeal to every voter in the garden. Once they spouted the right encouraging words, she was sure that the voters' short attention spans, simple voter laziness and careful control of the raven media would negate any voter interest in learning the important details behind the buzzwords.

Kammy's third strategy involved controlling the format of election stories on the raven media. This involved two steps. First, having the media lead with positive, uplifting videos and stories supplying the latest news on the Blue Party candidates. Second, having the media provide some apparent effort at balance by including a negative or embarrassing story about the Red Party candidates—typically something they said that others rebutted as factually incorrect or a bad idea—always ending on a negative note about Big Donnie and Van and a warm, happy feeling for Kammy and the coach. The goal was simple: occasionally equal time but never equal coverage.