

# Excitement Through the Roof as Harris Prepares to Accept Democratic Nomination

August 22, 2024 **by Dan McCue**



Vice President Kamala Harris speaks to delegates at the Democratic National Convention on Monday. (Photo by Dan McCue)

CHICAGO — Vice President Kamala Harris will deliver the biggest speech of her political career Thursday night as she formally accepts the Democratic nomination for president.

All week the United Center, ordinarily home to the Chicago Bulls and Chicago Blackhawks, has literally quaked with the excitement of delegates who cheered, waved flags and clapped vigorously for speaker after speaker — virtually all of them Democratic Party royalty.

So enthusiastic has the crowd been, and so unwilling to miss a single moment, that they've packed almost all of the venue's 23,500 seats all night every night, despite the fact that

convention-related parties and special events beckoned in almost every corner of the city.

What follows is just a sampling of what The Well News encountered as we moved about the venue. A fuller report will come in the form of a convention wrap-up on Friday.

Rep. Tom Suozzi, D-N.Y., was making his way slowly along a very crowded aisle on the convention floor, when he was stopped by a reporter.

“I’m just very, very happy,” the beaming congressman **said** when asked to assess what he’d seen and heard at the convention.

“There’s so much enthusiasm,” he said.

“I see it out in my district. I see it in different places in the country. And it’s just so obvious here,” he said.

“People are just on fire,” he added. “It’s very exciting.”

Hours later, on Wednesday night, Suozzi would address the convention on one of the hot-button issues of the 2024 race for the White House — immigration.

“The bottom line is that the people in the United States of America are concerned about the border,” he said.

Suozzi, a member of the bipartisan Problem Solvers

Caucus in the House, has long been involved in conversations on what to do about

Rep. Tom Suozzi, D-NY, soaks in the excitement at the DNC in Chicago. (Photo by Dan McCue)

the flow of migrants across the southern border of the United States, and his views on how to deal with the border played an outsized role in his being reelected to Congress earlier this year.

Still, immigration is widely viewed as an issue the Republicans, and particularly former President Donald Trump, score well on with voters.

Suozzi conceded the point to a point.

“The bottom line is we supported a bipartisan deal for securing the border, an agreement that was undercut by President Trump because he wanted to exploit the issue for his own political gain,” he said.

“When we make this clear to voters, and when we point out Vice President Harris was one of the earliest supporters of the deal, it evens up the polls on the issue of immigration,” he said.

Dressed in a vivid pink ensemble topped with a large hat bearing the words “hope” and “joy,” Samantha Hope Herring, chair of the Walton County, Florida, Democratic Party, was hard to miss as she made her way around the United Center during the nighttime portion of the Democratic National Convention.

“I’m also a little mouthy,” she said with a laugh, before quickly explaining that both she and her daughter, Savannah Atkins, were Florida delegates.

On her lapel she wore a button that said “Matt Gaetz must go,” a reference to conservative Republican Florida Rep. Matt Gaetz.

She was asked about why she felt it important to attend the **convention** and participate in this political moment.

“Oh, my God,” she **said**.

“This is all about hope and joy,” she said, twirling so that a reporter could take in the full design of her hat.

Samantha Hope Herring, chair of the Walton County, Florida, Democratic Party, shows off her convention hat. (Photo by Dan McCue)

“I mean, it’s about feeling like there’s a future for us that includes all of us,” Herring continued. “This is about a future of opportunities that don’t exist right now. It’s about going beyond where we are, and it’s about the America that we love.”

Atkins was originally elected to be a Biden delegate, but didn’t hesitate to become a Harris delegate once the president bowed out of the race.

“I really believe we’re about to have our first female president,” she said. “I really do believe Kamala will win.”

Herring added that being a delegate alongside her daughter, “Is just an incredible way to experience history in the making.”

Asked to recall the moment she first learned Harris would be the candidate, Herring said she didn’t feel it was as abrupt a transition as some make it seem.

“I mean, it just felt like a natural progression,” she said.

“I have a lot of faith in Joe Biden, and I have a lot of trust in Joe Biden, and I knew that he really had the interest of our country at the center of all he was doing,” Herring said.

“So when it started to become clear that he was thinking of making a change, I was okay with that. My feeling was, I would trust his judgment.

“After all, one of the things that he’s done very well as president is build teams and

The United Center in Chicago, primed for another night of political excitement. (Photo by Dan McCue)

bring in good people that could get the work done. So I knew whatever he decided, it would be something that would be to the benefit of the country.”

Still, Herring admitted, when Biden did make his decision and announce it to the world on a Sunday afternoon, “my heart was broken.”

“Because I loved the man,” she said.

“But, like I said, I knew he was doing what he thought was in the best interest of our country,” she added.

“Once I got over my initial feeling, I got really excited about the possibilities Harris represented, but I worried the transition from

one candidate to the other would be awkward. And then it wasn't. It was a really fluid process.”

Atkins nodded her agreement.

As chair of her local county party, Herring immediately established a Harris-centered Facebook page. A week later, it had 3,000 members and it continues to grow.

“The response has been huge ... and quite big for the panhandle of Florida,” she said. “It’s grown like a wildfire. It really has. And we’ve been having events in places where we never get Democrats organized ever.”

Inside the United Center arena, Verlon Jose, a delegate for Arizona and chairman of the Tohono O’odham Nation, greeted one well-wisher after another with a warm smile and a firm handshake.

“This election is very important to the Native Americans of this country, the original people of this country,” Jose said. “For many years, as you know, from the first European contact, the indigenous people have always been open to helping people that come to our country.”

Verlon Jose, a delegate for Arizona and chairman of the Tohono O’odham Nation.

(Photo by Dan McCue)

“Now, we may have gotten the short end of the stick, but you know what? We never stopped being united ... and we never stopped giving ... in short, we support people. And we’re making history here, supporting this candidate, [Harris], at this moment.”

Jose predicted that Native Americans “are going to come out in record numbers” this year, “just like they did in Arizona.”

“Native Americans helped turn Arizona from red to blue, and we are going to do that again and again and again,” he continued.

“This,” he said, acknowledging the thousands of delegates around him, “this is about uniting.”

“We [the Native American community] have always been about uniting. We are about building bridges, not walls. Bridges of humanity. Bridges to the original humanity,” Jose said. “We are about working together to make this country a place for everyone.”

With that he smiled, taking in the excitement around him.

“There’s a lot of talk about making this country great,” he said. “Well, we’re going to start right now, today, tomorrow, and in November. We are going to build that bridge to humanity.”

Throughout the week, a number of delegates spoke of how they were striving to keep local Democrats back home engaged in the excitement of the convention. Some relied on text apps and social media groups, others held Zoom calls.

Jose acknowledged those efforts are helpful, but he also **said** excitement finds its own way to be communicated.

“The message started a long time ago,” he said. “The people have been asking for this moment ... and the moment is here.

“Every single person in this building is going to leave here and go back to wherever they live, north, south, east and west, and they are going to carry this excitement, this power, back to their communities, to their rural towns, to wherever they call home, and pass this energy on to their neighbors” Jose continued.

Inside the arena at the United Center. (Photo by Dan McCue)

“This is a journey. This is a momentum that is moving forward. The fire is burning. They will never let this fire die,” he said.

But where, he was asked, did the momentum come from? It was only a month ago that most Democrats believed President Joe Biden would be at the top of the ticket. How did the switch to Harris become this tidal wave of enthusiasm?

“Well, we believe everything happens for a reason,” he said, struggling to make himself heard over the din around him. “Things happen, and sometimes we never know the reason.

“This is the right thing at the right time and it’s about seizing the moment,” Jose continued.

“Now, as for what happened a few weeks ago, no one knew what was going to happen,” he said. “Until the president actually ended his campaign, no one could have told you how things



would play out, but the thing is, it happened, so it was really about getting behind and supporting the movement.

“And when I use the word ‘movement,’ I’m not talking about this summer. This is a movement that started the moment Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris got into office. So in a sense, we were ready, come what may, and we will be ready to elect the first woman president of the United States of America,” Jose said.

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