



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on September 1, 2024

## Walz's Alleged Motivation to Enter Politics Doesn't Withstand Scrutiny

When it comes to his own biography, Minnesota Governor Tim Walz has a rather [strained relationship](#) with the truth. The latest example: his tale of how he, then a high-school teacher, and two of his students were denied entry to a 2004 rally for then-President George W. Bush — the incident that supposedly spurred him to enter politics.

According to the [Washington Examiner](#), however, Walz's political origin story "contains significant inaccuracies":



AP Images  
Tim Walz

For one, Walz was admitted into the Bush rally, according to a source familiar, who insisted on anonymity to discuss the August 2004 event. The two teenagers Walz arrived with, Matt Klaber and Nick Burkhart, were not his students, the *Washington Examiner* confirmed.

Moreover, the teenagers were barred from the event after a confrontation that made local news earlier in the week — leading to them initially being denied tickets.

And while Walz [framed](#) the squabble as the "moment that I decided to run for office" since he had "never been overly involved in political campaigns," evidence suggests that Walz was already politically active by that point: He participated days earlier in an anti-Bush protest before the 2004 Bush rally in Mankota [sic], Minnesota, on Aug. 4, an [image](#) confirms.

"He was looking for an origin story," Chris Faulkner, a former Bush campaign staffer who worked the rally, told the *Examiner*. "And he made one up."



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## Students for a Democratic Society

Did Walz really claim Klaber and Burkhart were “his students”? On the one hand, he began a 2020 Twitter (now X) [thread](#) stating that he “brought two fellow teachers’ children to the speech.” On the other hand, later in the thread, he [wrote](#), “I wished to hear directly from the President and *my students*, regardless of political party, deserved to witness the historical moment of a sitting president coming to our city.” (Emphasis added.) Furthermore, in a 2022 interview with [Minnesota Public Radio](#), Walz said he told Bush event staffers he was “their teacher.”

Neither young man, in fact, was a student at Mankato West High School, where Walz taught, at the time of the incident. Burkhart did not attend Mankato West at all. Klaber, a Mankato West graduate who, the *Examiner* reported, “never even took a class with Walz while attending the school,” was by then attending Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minnesota.

In his Twitter thread, Walz [admitted](#) that the two students “had previously volunteered for the democratic party [sic].” Klaber was a member of the College Democrats at his institution, and both would later volunteer for Walz’s 2006 congressional campaign (a sympathetic [blogger](#) would also describe them as “Walz’s former students”). Clearly, they were not just students interested in hearing what Bush had to say but were, in fact, activists for the opposing party — a key factor in the events that followed.

## Sticker Shock

According to Walz, he and the students, all of whom had tickets for the event, were denied entry after staffers noticed a John Kerry sticker on one of the students’ wallets. Kerry, then the junior senator from Massachusetts, was Bush’s Democratic opponent.

The *Examiner* found that “important context is missing from [Walz’s] retelling”:

That’s because Klaber and Burkhart had a public confrontation with the Bush campaign days before the 2004 rally. The teenagers were heard making “unfavorable comments” about Bush as they waited in line and were initially denied tickets, according to an [archived](#) news report.

After the story was reported by local news, because Klaber called the press, the Bush campaign contacted the teenagers and offered them tickets. In the lead-up to the 2004 election, there was heightened protest activity as police [made arrests](#) at campaign events. Klaber’s parents knew Walz and asked him to chaperone the teenagers to the event, expecting they may run into a problem.

They did: That day, as the trio waited in line, Bush campaign staffers told them that the Secret Service deemed Klaber and Burkhart a threat.

In 2006, having interviewed Walz, [The Atlantic](#) characterized the subsequent events as follows:

Indignant, Walz refused [to leave]. “As a soldier, I told them I had a right to see my commander-in-chief,” the normally jovial forty-one-year-old recently explained to a Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party dinner in the small town of Albert Lea, Minnesota.

His challenge prompted a KGB-style interrogation that was sadly characteristic of Bush campaign events. Do you support the president? Walz refused to answer. Do you oppose the



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president? Walz replied that it was no one's business but his own. (He later learned that his wife was informed that the Secret Service might arrest him.) Walz thought for a moment and asked the Bush staffers if they really wanted to arrest a command sergeant major who'd just returned from fighting the war on terrorism.

### **Methinks He Doth Protest**

As we now know, Walz was [not a command sergeant major](#), nor did he [see combat](#) in the "war on terrorism."

Did his wife really learn he was in danger of arrest? If so, it may have been because, just days earlier, he had been [spotted](#) outside the Bush-rally ticket center holding a sign reading "Enduring Freedom Veterans for Kerry" — even though, of course, he had never been to Afghanistan.

Walz ultimately did attend the rally. Nevertheless, the injustice of the incident, as Walz saw it, supposedly drove the previously politically aloof Minnesotan to run for Congress, a move that eventually elevated him to the Democratic Party's vice-presidential nominee.

But, as his appearance at the pre-rally protest shows, that part of his story holds just as much water as the rest.

"It's clear he was politically involved before [the rally incident]," Faulkner told the *Examiner*. "He was protesting in front of the ticket distribution center. It's all bulls\*\*\*."



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