



America Needs to Protect Gus Walz, Now and in November.

by John Pavlovitz | Aug 24, 2024 | Opinions & Commentary



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The Walz family at the DNC. Image: Tim Walz Facebook page.

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What we are seeing directed at Gus Walz isn't a mystery. It is the rotten, putrid fruit of generations of conservative toxic masculinity resulting in men who were never emotionally mature enough to show or receive love.

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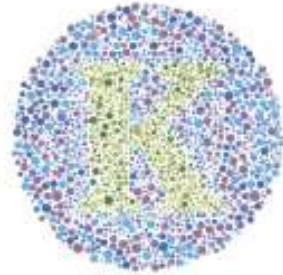
As Minnesota Governor Tim Walz was pausing in a moment of rapturous applause during his Vice Presidential acceptance speech at the DNC, the camera panned to his family, whose effusive joy and pride were unmistakable.

Suddenly, the Governor's 17-year old son Gus rose to his feet, tears erupting from his eyes, as he pointed toward the stage and shouted "That's my dad!"

It was, to most people, a heart-filling moment of spontaneous humanity. To them, it was a front row seat to one family's intimate connection. To tens of millions of Americans, it was an unapologetic, beautiful display of unfettered emotion that brought them to tears.



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But it was not that to everyone.

Within seconds, social media was flooded with a furious sewage of Conservative cruelty: mercilessly ridiculing Gus, showering him with slurs and insults, and speaking unthinkably vile things about the teenager.

And *why*?

Because Gus Walz openly loves his father?

Because he was so filled with pride watching someone close to him doing something wonderful?

Because he cried in public?



He lives with ADHD, anxiety, and a nonverbal learning disorder.

These conditions often result in a struggle with controlling feelings in social situations.

But that isn't the point.

In fact, that's almost irrelevant.

It shouldn't matter if Gus Walz has any special needs or medical conditions. He could be the most typical or "normal" (whatever that means) of teenage boys—and the mistreatment and bullying he has faced should still be disgusting and unacceptable to decent people. It should illicit outrage in human beings of empathy and intelligence.

We should normalize young men crying.

We should celebrate families like the Walzes.

We should value tenderness and empathy whenever they show up.

What we are seeing directed at Gus Walz isn't a mystery. It is the rotten, putrid fruit of generations of conservative toxic masculinity resulting in men who were never emotionally mature enough to show or receive love; millions of people whose default instinct is to be so threatened by authentic joy that it needs to mock and attack and eliminate it.



We are witnessing in real-time, the cost of elevating someone like Donald Trump to power: of normalizing his ignorant name-calling, his exploiting of differences, his bullying of those who are vulnerable or different, his hatred of expressions of love that he is incapable of.

This pattern was on display nine years ago when he mocked a disabled reporter and what should have been a campaign-killing moment became the first in an expansive and still-growing resume of filth.



Trump mocking a disabled reporter. Image: Video grab

America, we all deserve better.

Gus Walz is all our sons.

He is our nephew and classmate and neighbor and friend.

He is every young man navigating this life and trying to figure out the best way to be human.

And we, the adults who inhabit this place need to protect him.



We need to normalize young men showing affection and revealing emotion, to realize how important it is to love and be loved while we are here.

We need to rise together and declare that we will not be a nation that stands for the vicious attacks on a teenager, any teenager, for any reason, whatever they look like or how they act or who they love or how they are visibly different.

And we need to vote for an America that will provide safe harbor for every Gus Walz and to demand leaders who will not nurture the worst in us but call us to our better angels.

Gus Walz deserves this.

All our sons deserve this.

America deserves this.

John Pavlovitz

John Pavlovitz is a writer, pastor, and activist from Wake Forest, North Carolina. A 25-year veteran in the trenches of local church ministry, John is committed to equality, diversity, and justice—both inside and outside faith communities. When not actively working for a more compassionate planet, John enjoys spending time with his family, exercising, cooking, and having time in





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