

Trump's Team of Mercenaries

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Kimberly Guilfoyle was so close to getting it right.

The Trump hanger-on—former fiancée to Don Jr. and the current ambassador to Greece—was exchanging messages with a man named Eric Deters, according to a [bombshell Wall Street Journal story](#) last night. Deters, a right-wing podcast host, failed political candidate, and suspended lawyer in Kentucky, wanted help in clearing up some tax issues, and also wanted the Trump administration to extradite a doctor whose alleged fraud victims he was advising in a legal case. Guilfoyle, the messages indicate, wanted money—in one instance, a \$100,000 wire—and she wanted it untraceable.

Guilfoyle was right to worry about secrecy. She was about to begin confirmation hearings for her ambassadorship, and understood the pay-to-play could hurt her. Yet neither she nor Deters could stop breaking the [Stringer Bell rule](#) by recording their skullduggery in writing.

“It won’t show up anywhere if you wire money to American Express,” Guilfoyle wrote. “Please.” And in another: “Honey please I need you to get this done for me today.” Yet even as she laid these instructions out, she kept haranguing Deters for indiscretion. “I really wish you would stop papering all these things. It’s really dangerous and not helpful to you or me while you could simply just call me on signal,” she wrote, referring to the encrypted messaging app. In one message, she wrote, “If you write an email or a text about, I’m gonna kill you cause I love you but you’re so out of control.” Unfortunately for Guilfoyle, her Signal messages were not as safe a space as she might have wished. (The *Journal* does not reveal how it viewed the messages. Guilfoyle’s lawyer broadly disputed their authenticity to the paper but offered no details.)

Somehow, this is not the only Trump scandal with Balkan ties in the news this week. [The New York Times reported](#) that James Blair and Chris LaCivita, who are ostensibly President Trump’s top political advisers, traveled—during an intense midterm campaign in which Republicans appear to be on the verge of serious setbacks—to advise a candidate in Bosnia and Herzegovina’s self-governing Serbian entity.

Both of these stories show the way that many people in Trump’s orbit view their positions not as public service but as a profit center. There’s a long and often depressing pattern of former officials capitalizing on government and political work, but Trump’s aides aren’t even willing to wait until they take their leave to start taking. Forget a team of rivals. Trump world is a team of mercenaries, [in some cases literally](#).

Jared Kushner, who was a senior adviser in his first presidency and is married to his daughter Ivanka, continues to work as an envoy for Trump while pursuing business deals around the world. As Dexter Filkins [wrote in The New Yorker](#) in September, Kushner’s record as a diplomat is underwhelming, yet his financial

gains have been enormous. “He represents a new kind of Washington figure, for whom public office serves as a means to extraordinary wealth,” Filkins wrote. Kushner and Ivanka Trump even have their own Balkan boondoggle, an attempt to develop [an island in Albania](#) that has run into legal and political difficulties.

Earlier this year, the *Times* reported that Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick helped negotiate access to [Kazakh tungsten reserves](#) for an American mining company, and the federal government provided \$1.6 billion in financing. Lutnick’s sons and Trump’s sons are both involved with companies that stand to profit from the deal (though representatives for them have said that they did not play a role in the deal). A [Washington Post investigation](#) this summer noted that Trump’s sons have invested heavily in defense-technology companies; the companies have scored “at least \$3.2 billion in direct government business since the sons invested and an additional \$3.1 billion in future contract options.” (Company representatives told the *Post* that they secured their business without assistance from Trump’s sons.)

Where do any of these people get the idea that this is appropriate or that they can get away with it? From the president himself, naturally. Trump has moved on from small-scale gifts such as [charging the Secret Service](#) exorbitant fees to stay in his hotels during his first term to far more ambitious and lucrative schemes such as [crypto ventures](#); even conservative estimates put his gains during this term alone in the billions.

Though Trump doesn’t have ethical scruples, he does have a sense of right and wrong: It’s right for him to profiteer, but wrong for others to make too much money from his name. That’s where Blair, LaCivita, and Guilfoyle may run into trouble. *Politico* [reports](#) that Republicans’ “knives are now fully out” for the two consultants. Trump himself weighed in [on Truth Social](#), saying he was unaware of their clients but adding that he “will, on reflection, ask them and, if there’s a conflict, I will terminate them, immediately!” Firing them just before the midterms seems risky, as it might just create more chaos for Republicans, but they could make for good scapegoats after the fact. Trump has not spoken publicly about the Guilfoyle story, although Vice President Vance said he didn’t “[love that](#).” In a further embarrassment, the article emerged while Secretary of State Marco Rubio was visiting Athens.

Perhaps inevitably, Guilfoyle’s relationship with Deters ended acrimoniously. “I have paid you \$300,000 over the years,” he wrote her in 2025, adding, in an amusingly self-negating flourish, “As of this memo, I have not received one favor. I am not naive or a sucker.” She was not happy, either. “What a nightmare you’ll literally cost me my ambassadorship stop writing,” she told him at one point, per the *Journal*. Her warning may have been too late.

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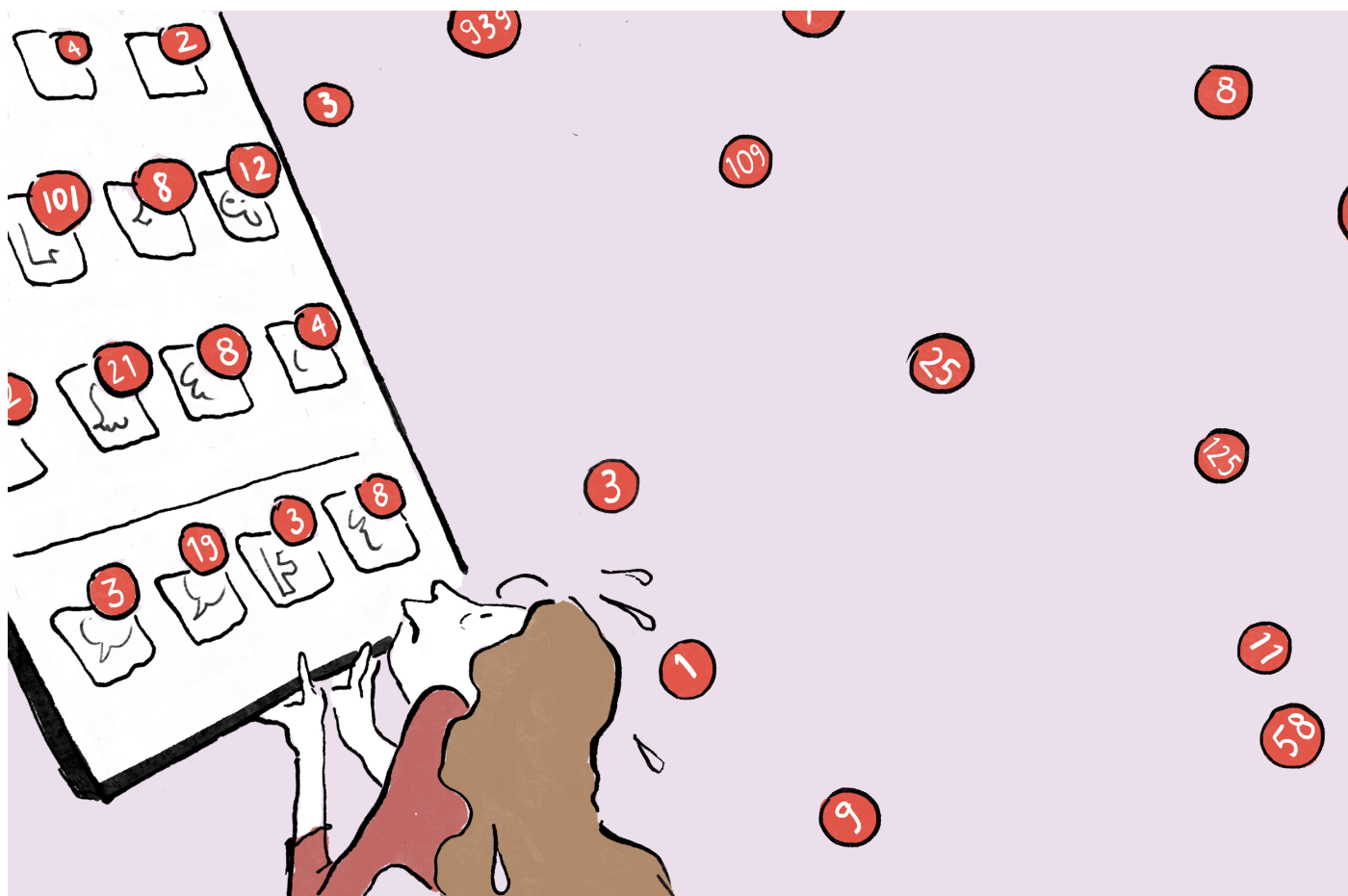


Illustration by Hannah Robinson

Forgive the Bad Texters

By Julie Beck

Whenever I receive a text, this is what happens. I pick up my phone. So far, so good. I experience whatever

emotion the message elicits—the pleasant warmth of being reached out to, possibly the annoyance of being interrupted. Then, if conditions are right, if I’m not too busy or in the middle of talking with someone else, if my mind is at peace, if my anxiety is at no more than a low hum, if Mercury is not in retrograde, I will respond right then and there. If conditions are not right, it will be as though the text never existed at all.

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