



MADISON - Last Tuesday, April 2nd, Wisconsin held both its presidential primary and a slew of local elections—ranging from city councils and township boards to school boards and mayors to county boards, county executives, and judges, in communities of all sizes. Of the 287 local candidates who ran with the Democratic Party of Wisconsin's support, 180 won. **That's a win rate of 63% for WisDems**

, powered by the work of extraordinary candidates, campaigns, volunteers, and staff in every corner of the state.

**The presidential primary demonstrated a clear vote of confidence in Joe Biden, who won support from 88.6% of the voters in the Democratic primary.** Democrats don't just want to stop Trump, they want another Biden-Harris term. Voters want progress. And it's not just Democrats. Independents and many Republicans across Wisconsin want a government that is protecting their personal freedoms and building an economy that works for all people—not just a wealthy few. **Across the state, Joe Biden earned 35,000+ more votes than Donald Trump.**

Meanwhile, the Republican Party remains more divided, with Nikki Haley receiving nearly 13% of the vote. In Green Bay, where Donald Trump personally spent the day stumping to turn out votes, the City Council flipped from MAGA candidates controlling half the vote to a 7-5, progressive, pro-democracy majority. **The more voters are reminded of what Trump represents, the less they want of his people and policies.**

WisDem's year-round organizing machine continues to deliver results: **This spring, we beat our own organizing records for spring elections without a statewide race on the ballot.** Our volunteers and staff reached out to hundreds of thousands of Wisconsin voters through door knocks, phone calls, and relational contacts. And in an election where a pivotal race in Green Bay was decided by just 15 votes, we know every single one of those contacts matters. Building relationships and working hard for every vote is how we set the stage for November,

# Democratic Analysis and Reflections on Spring 2024 Wisconsin Elections

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when we will re-elect President Biden and Senator Tammy Baldwin and defeat the MAGA movement in Wisconsin.

The memo that follows will walk through key results, WisDem's organizing effort, and our analysis and reflections as we prepare for November.

## KEY RESULTS

### *Key Victories Up And Down The Ballot*

**Democratic Presidential Primary:** Statewide, President Joe Biden earned 511,845 votes—35,490 more votes than Trump's 476,355. Biden won support from 88.6% of the voters in the Democratic primary, compared to Trump's 79.2%. 124,048 Republicans voted against Trump in the GOP primary.

**Milwaukee County Executive and Mayor:** Milwaukee County Executive David Crowley and Mayor Cavalier Johnson each soared to victory with 80% of the vote. Congratulations!

**Fake Elector Defeated in La Crosse:** Kelly Leibold, a community leader and brain cancer survivor, ran for La Crosse County Board District 1 against fake elector Bill Feehan, formerly the chair of the La Crosse County GOP. Leibold won 61-39. We continue to see that fake electors, and the people whose plots they serve, lose elections.

**Portage County Board Majority:** Progressive challengers defeated five conservative incumbents, while progressive incumbents defeated conservative challengers in four other races—yielding a progressive majority in this central Wisconsin county. Way to go, Portage County Dems!

### *Success In School Board Races and Referenda Statewide*

We continue to find success in our partnership with local candidates for school board across the state. This year, WisDems made a significant, six-figure investment in supporting these candidates to counter ongoing organizing from far-right groups such as Moms For Liberty, which have been active in pushing policies harmful to our kids—such as book bans and attacks on LGBTQ+ students and faculty. **Across 29 school districts this spring, 33 candidates prevailed, out of 49 total—including key races in Wausau, Kenosha, and De Pere.**

Our work on these races took many forms—helping with mailers, door knocking, collaborating on campaign best practices, among other support—but in every case was motivated by a desire to help great candidates who are in it for the right reasons. As Gov. Evers often reminds us, what's best for our kids is what's best for our state. All of the candidates we proudly worked with this Spring embody that fundamental Wisconsin value.

Meanwhile, due to GOP underfunding of public schools, communities across Wisconsin held referenda to fund their public school systems. In community after community, from Milwaukee

to rural districts around the state, WisDems volunteers proudly supported school funding initiatives—and passed more than 60% of these measures.

### ***Green Bay: A Nailbiter City Council Win With National Implications***

Donald Trump personally spent Election Day in Green Bay, where his presence led to a major defeat in the City Council race. The MAGA movement has been targeting Green Bay relentlessly with conspiracy theories and held half of the City Council seats (6-6) heading into Election Day. With Trump in the city, a first-time candidate and anti-Trump progressive named Joey Prestley won a key race by 15 votes, creating a 7-5, pro-democracy majority on the Council. This race is the clearest illustration of the Democratic Party, who works to turn out every vote, and a Republican Party who caters to whatever Trump wants.

The candidates who made this majority possible summed it up best on Election Night:

- Justin Prestley, who won by 15 votes: “I beat an extremist. Now I get to go make change.”
- Kathy Hinkfuss, who won by 43 votes: “We worked our tails off. Door to door to door. Only way to win.”
- Ben Delie, who won by 54 votes, added: “Every weekend, for months. It feels great.”

### ***Tough Losses Statewide and in Local Races***

Not everything went our way last week. The two statewide questions on constitutional amendments pushed by conspiracy theorists in the GOP both passed. WisDems and nonpartisan groups opposed these amendments; they’ll create confusion in the courts and cut off potential sources of support for election administration. That said, these amendments were based on bogus conspiracy theories about 2020. Our focus is on 2024 and beyond, and these amendments don’t affect our path to victory. At the same time, these amendments underscore how the constitutional amendment process can be abused. 12 out of 13 proposed amendments to the Wisconsin constitution over the last two decades have passed; the one exception, Scott Walker’s attempt to eliminate the office of State Treasurer, was defeated thanks to an intensive campaign led by now-Secretary of State Sarah Godlewski.

The toughest losses were in individual races. Katie Rosenberg, the terrific mayor of Wausau, lost by 424 votes to Doug Diny, who benefited from a wave of support both from the WisGOP and from dark money groups affiliated with election deniers and Robin Vos. We’re grateful for her service and confident that, while this chapter has closed, most of her story is yet unwritten. The same night, Biden earned more votes than Trump in Wausau and progressive candidates

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won two of the three school board races, making clear the jump-ball status of this central Wisconsin community.

Meanwhile, in Kenosha's mayoral race, some judicial elections, Waukesha's school board, and other places—37% of the races we worked on—we came up short. We'll continue to do all we can to learn at least as much from defeats as we do from victories, and improve our strategies and tactics accordingly as we look to November and beyond.

## ANALYSIS AND REFLECTIONS

### - *The more voters hear from Trump, the less they want of him*

The GOP has to ask itself: Did Trump's visit to Green Bay cost them the City Council majority? While Republican voters were standing in line, Democrats were out knocking on doors. On top of this, Trump's visit put his unpopular policies back in the spotlight.

We all know Trump left office with a dismal approval rating of just 34 percent, but after four years out of the spotlight, [some voters seem to have forgotten how bad it was](#). But by returning to Wisconsin, Trump reminded voters that he is a dangerous wannabe dictator who has already taken away abortion rights, fomented an insurrection, and abased America on the world stage.

### - *There are more opportunities for Biden than for Trump in reaching disaffected voters*

This race showed, once again, the Republican party is still divided. Nikki Haley won 12.8% of the Republican vote—a clear sign of dissatisfaction with Trump himself as the Republican nominee. In response, Trump is [further alienating Haley and her 76,752 supporters in Wisconsin](#).

In the Democratic primary, 8.3% of voters cast “Uninstructed” ballots, sending a message about the ongoing crisis in Gaza. President Biden will be fighting for every vote. His work to secure a just and enduring peace in Gaza, Israel, and the West Bank—ending the gut-wrenching humanitarian crisis and ensuring Hamas hostages return home—can demonstrate to these voters that their message is heard, and earn the support of many of these voters in the general election. Meanwhile, Biden is [welcoming Haley voters to vote for him in order to stop Trump](#). Haley voters weren't sending a message about a particular policy—they were rejecting Trump himself.

In other words, there may well be more opportunity for Biden than for Trump in both building

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Democratic party unity and reaching out to disaffected voters from the other side.

- ***Every vote matters***

WisDems fights for every single vote because we know first hand that every vote matters. The photo-finish races for Green Bay City Council were far from the closest races in Wisconsin on April 2.

- The Milwaukee Public Schools referendum we supported passed by a photo-finish margin of just 2%.
- In Marathon County, Bill Conway defeated incumbent Republican-backed County Supervisor Tony Sherfinski by a single vote.
- In Rock County, Genia Stevens won her race for the 13th County Board district by 3 votes—and in the eleventh district, the race was tied, 190-190. By law, the choice between Democratic-endorsed Brandon Buchanan and Lori Marshall will come down to a random drawing after the results are certified.

When Governor Evers signed the new state legislative maps into law this February, the number of competitive districts tripled. It's entirely within the realm of possibility that these kinds of hypercompetitive races will determine the Assembly majority in November.

- ***Progressive victories require collective action***

Our year-round organizing program continues to strengthen the progressive movement in Wisconsin. The vast majority of the local candidates who ran on Tuesday benefited from field organizing by our amazing county parties and neighborhood teams, which generated thousands of completed volunteer shifts that led to hundreds of thousands of voter contact attempts. Additionally, 83 candidates received additional support from WisDems, including assistance with digital ads, campaign strategy, mailers, and more.

We remain immensely grateful to our partners in this work—from elected officials to unions to grassroots groups all over the state. We've posted a thank-you note thanking dozens of groups that worked on local elections this year [on Twitter here](#).

### **LOOKING AHEAD TO NOVEMBER IN MUST-WIN WISCONSIN**

Every election both matters on its own terms and is preparation for the next election.

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Wisconsin, where four of the last six presidential races came down to less than 1% margins, remains poised on a knife's edge. This spring's election demonstrates the superior state of progressive infrastructure in Wisconsin, the depth of WisDems organizing, and the deep bench of strong candidates. At the same time, the intensity of GOP investments in the state will only grow as November approaches.

We've got 208 days until November 5. All of us at WisDems are incredibly grateful for everyone who ran, chipped in, and volunteered this spring. As we parse the data from the spring election (especially after the full voter file is loaded in May), we plan to do everything possible to use this spring's fights as a launchpad for victories up and down the ballot this fall—in the presidential, Senate, House, state legislative races, and every office up and down the ballot.