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[00:00:20] **Speaker 1** In Wisconsin's third congressional district, a Trump endorsed Republican, Derek Van Orden, is headed to Washington. Weeks before the election, national Democratic Party funders pulled support from their candidate Brad Path. But was it closer than expected? Did the group air in redirecting its money? We turn to Anthony Gorski, political science professor at UW La Crosse. And thanks very much for being here.

[00:00:45] **Speaker 2** Thank you.

[00:00:46] **Speaker 1** So as to those questions, did the Democrats House Majority PAC miscalculate here?

[00:00:53] **Speaker 2** Yes, the race was much closer than expected. And, Fredricka, in most close congressional races, the political parties and the political action committees get heavily involved to assist the candidates. What was so striking about this race was the lack of party support and the lack of support from those key political action committees in helping Brad Path, the Democrat. I think Democrats, both within the party and within these key political action committees, clearly miscalculated. They clearly did not expect this race to be as close as it was because as a political scientist, my expectation is that when a race is close, you're going to get the party heavily involved, you're going to get the PAC's heavily involved. That did not happen. Clearly, there was some disconnect in the Democratic Party about the state of this race.

[00:01:45] **Speaker 1** Do you feel as though their calculations were based on what happened in the last election for this seat?

[00:01:52] **Speaker 2** Very possible, Frederica. After all, Ron, kind of the longtime incumbent from this district, had the closest election of his career when he ran against Derek Van Orden in 2020. It was just a three point margin of victory for kind. Plus, we had seen some indications in presidential elections that this area in western Wisconsin was drifting away from the Democratic Party. So Democrats might have gotten a bit hung up on those results the closer that expected result in 2020, the presidential results and maybe I'd written off this district a little more than they should have. In retrospect, it was a mistake on their part, and they may have to have a course correction in 2024 to regroup in this area.

[00:02:37] **Speaker 1** So to your knowledge, did the Democratic pack put their money to better use somewhere else?

[00:02:45] **Speaker 2** It is possible, Frederica, because after all, the Democrats had a much better night, a much better election year than expected. The Democrats really limited the gains that the Republicans made in the House of Representatives. So overall, the Democrats had a much better than expected night. Still, local Democrats here in western Wisconsin are furious at the Democratic Party for leaving Brad Path to fend for himself, for not giving grad path the support. So we have a bit of a split screen here on one end. The Democrats clearly did better than expected overall. On the other hand, western Wisconsin Democrats think that their candidate was left out to dry.

[00:03:27] **Speaker 1** So the third congressional district lines up like others in Wisconsin. Rural areas are red, cities are blue. How did Democrats lose rural voters in the district?

[00:03:38] **Speaker 2** I think Derek Van Orden has a real connection with rural voters in the same way that Donald Trump did. Derek Van Orden really speaks to the cultural politics of rural Wisconsin. He speaks to the Trump style appeal that bought a lot of rural areas in Wisconsin. Enter the Republican fold. At the same time, Frederica La Crosse in Eau Claire really did deliver for Brad Path, and that meant for a close race overall.

[00:04:06] **Speaker 1** So just does Donald Trump still hold a lot of sway there then.

[00:04:11] **Speaker 2** Certainly in the rural parts of the district, Frederica? But we have seen some concerns from from Republicans like Assembly Speaker Robin Vos about the effect of Donald Trump in suburban areas in Wisconsin. So it's a really fascinating issue going on in the Republican Party right now. Certainly a Republican candidate like Derek Van Orden did very well in the rural parts of this district. At the same time, in statewide elections in Wisconsin, such as the election for governor, Republicans clearly suffered additional setbacks in suburban areas. So on one hand, the Republicans continue to do fantastically well in rural Wisconsin. On the other hand, people like Speaker Vos are very concerned about the situation for the party in key suburbs.

[00:05:00] **Speaker 1** So how do Trump Republicans like Van Orden potentially have to moderate politically in a potentially post-Trump world? Because I know a lot of people are kind of mad at him right now.

[00:05:15] **Speaker 2** It's a fascinating issue, Frederica. And it speaks to the type of. Political strategy Mr. Van Orden will engage in as a member of Congress. Over 150,000 voters went for his Democratic opponent, Brad Path, and it was only about a four point margin of victory for Van Orden. So one approach he could take is the wrong kind Steve Gunderson type approach. The last two members of Congress from this area kind a moderate Democrat. Gunderson a moderate Republican. They really took a lot of efforts to reach out to the other party. It's interesting to consider the possibility of Derek Van Wert and trying to reach out to Democrats, trying to reach out to independents to perhaps expand his appeal in advance of upcoming elections. On the other hand, Derek Van Orden also really focused on the Republican base. That would mean, though, that elections in this area would continue to be highly competitive because western Wisconsin is unpredictable. Voters tend to vote the candidate a bit more than the party. So Mr. Van Orden, is political strategy as he becomes a member of Congress is going to be just fascinating to watch.

[00:06:27] **Speaker 1** All right. Well, Anthony Czajkowski, thanks very much.

[00:06:31] **Speaker 2** Thank you.