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[00:00:01] **Speaker 1** So we've come a long way from the last time we were talking to you in the lead up to a big election two years ago where everything is by Zoom. And one of the big questions was how would Democrats manage the election when they weren't doing doors? So kind of walk me through where you are today, what you've learned from there, and then what are the takeaways about the value of doors and all the other technology combined?

[00:00:22] **Speaker 2** So the thing that's been very clear really for all political history, certainly the last few years, is that individual conversations make a difference when people hear from someone, especially someone that they connect with, that they trust someone from their community. It can move voters to take part or to vote, hopefully for Democrats this fall. During the pandemic, we had to switch to totally virtual organizing. It was all calling people, reaching out through their phones, social media, text messages. After the pandemic, I came under more control. We started expanding our toolkit. So now, rather than just focusing on knocking on doors or just doing virtual organizing, we have a three pronged approach. We call it the Trident. One prong of the trident is knocking on doors. Another prong of the trident is virtual organizing, which you can do from anywhere, which includes text messages, phone calls, reaching out through social media. The third prong of the trident is what's called relational organizing, which is a systematic approach to making sure that people contact people that they know. All the research says that when you hear from someone that you already have a relationship with, it has a much bigger impact. So we want everyone to spread the word that it's time to reelect Governor Evers, time to defeat Ron Johnson, and elect Mandela Barnes to the Senate and support Democrats up and down the ballot.

[00:01:38] **Speaker 1** So one of the things that's different this time around compared to four years ago is you have a couple of incumbents, Josh Kaul and Tony Evers. What difference does that make in terms of name, value and getting people to know, hey, they've done something in 2018.

[00:01:51] **Speaker 2** We had Scott Walker, who had done so many things that that alienated and hurt Wisconsinites. And in 2020, we had Donald Trump, who we were trying to defeat. This time, we're reelecting Governor Evers and Attorney General Kaul and sending Lieutenant Governor Barnes to the US Senate based on the record that they've built of actually doing what's right for Wisconsinites. They have shown up, gotten to work every day and gotten rolled up their sleeves to do the things that make a difference in people's lives. Whether that's signing a 15% Middle-Class Income Tax Cut into law, paving enough roads to drive all the way to Tim Michael's house in Connecticut and back, or making sure that our schools get the investment they need. We're now back in the top ten in the country in the quality of our schools. That's a huge asset. And you can compare that with what we see from the GOP. Someone like Ron Johnson, who time and again has turned his back on Wisconsinites, voted against the American rescue plan to support public safety and small businesses and communities around our state while giving giant tax breaks to his wealthiest donors. That the contrast of records. The contrast of visions allows us to make a very strong case for reelection in 2022. Well.

[00:03:00] **Speaker 1** So. So in terms of that name recognition and we're just seeing horse signs don't vote. We're told that repeatedly by the Democratic operatives that, you know, signs are nice, but they don't they don't actually cast a ballot. But we're seeing more of those in places that did not exist before. You know, the governor especially has built up, you know, a war chest. He's built up name I.D. That's got to help. As he watched the Republicans battle in the primary.

[00:03:24] **Speaker 2** This is a choice election in both the governor's race and in the Senate race, where on the one hand, you have Governor Evers who is goes to work every day doing the right thing and people see it and know it and trust him, know that he's fighting for people like them versus Tim Michaels, who was laying out a radical vision for the state, pushing for this the enforcement of this extreme, a total ban on abortion, doing all the things that would allow guns to get into schools, supporting 18 year olds, buying air 15 with no background check or waiting period. The the attacks that he's made on our democracy and hinting that he might not even certify a legitimate presidential election if his favorite candidate doesn't win. Those really are out of step with Wisconsin values. And to run a campaign focused on those kinds of things demonstrates that his priorities don't match up with with families across the state who just want someone on their side to make sure that there are good schools and jobs and roads in our state. In the US Senate race, we have Mandela Barnes, whose record of working for working families in the legislature as lieutenant governor of our state is such a strong contrast with what we see from Ron Johnson, some of the most radical, extreme Republican policies, and now talking about putting Social Security and Medicare on the congressional chopping block. Those are things that really fall flat with with working families across our state.

[00:04:45] **Speaker 1** You mentioned the election conspiracies, and there have been questions about how much of that will carry over into November. Obviously, it was a big deal in the Republican primary, but they kind of softened their stance. You swept some of that under the rug, so to speak. Well, that's still resonate with voters who were concerned about what may happen with the Republicans in power.

[00:05:04] **Speaker 2** For the last year and a half, we've seen Republicans make their case for why they should be their party's nominees. And over and over, it's about going back in time and undoing the 2020 election or rigging the next one instead of actually addressing the needs that Wisconsin families have to to make sure that jobs come back to the United States, that we have protections for our seniors and for people with preexisting conditions. I mean, these are bread and butter issues that folks like Mandela, Barnes and Tony Evers have dedicated their lives to. It's Republicans who keep pushing these really far out, extreme kind of ultra Trumpist, ultra mega ideas about changing election laws if they don't like the outcome. So that, I think, speaks as they say. It's not just what the candidates say about the issues, it's what the issues say about the candidates. And when Republicans want to scrap bipartisan oversight of our elections so that they can put their own people in charge and potentially flip an election if they don't like what voters decide, that is just an un-American on Wisconsin way to approach democracy.

[00:06:04] **Speaker 1** We've heard Tony Evers say that some of these ideas and policies that are being proposed are undemocratic. We heard Joe Biden say the Republicans are going towards semi fascism. Are either those statements too strong for what we're seeing in the moment?

[00:06:17] **Speaker 2** It is really no exaggeration. When you look at January 6th, we know that Ron Johnson was trying to give fake electors to Mike Pence so that he could ignore the will of Wisconsin voters. We know that Derek Van Orden was at the insurrection at the Capitol. We saw an ultra Trumpist ultra maga insurrection try to stop American democracy from functioning, to use violence, to freeze it in its tracks. That's a threat to the to the the flag that people have fought and died for, to the very idea of America. So as we think about this fall, it's really about freedom. It's the freedom to be able to choose our own leaders, the freedom to decide what to do with our own bodies, the freedom to be able to prosper and support our families. This is a very serious moment in the history of our country, and it's hard to think of words that would be too strong to express the stakes in this fall's election.

[00:07:08] **Speaker 1** You can usually tell a lot about a candidate based on the words they use and the audience that they're seeking. And in the base primary election, there was a lot about election conspiracies and tip toeing into that fraud thing, even if candidates knew that wasn't the truth. But they haven't been saying that to the general election audience. Is that because they know that doesn't resonate with with a more moderate election or independents?

[00:07:31] **Speaker 2** We can tell from how Republicans are running their campaigns. Two things. One is that they know that their their real intentions around democracy are hideous to most voters, that most voters want voters to choose their leaders, not leaders, to choose whether they should have permanent power and control. But what we've also seen from Robin Vos, from Tim Michaels, from all of these Republican politicians who will do anything to get Donald Trump's help and endorsement and face primary challenges if they don't go. Ultra maga enough. If they are in power and Trump comes calling asking them to change an election result, we've seen that they're willing to do anything to get Trump's approval, and that's a dangerous place for America. When you take an oath, you should be actually swearing allegiance to our Constitution and our flag and to execute the laws faithfully. Not an oath of allegiance to one individual who doesn't think that democracy should apply to him. What we saw with Ron, with what we saw with Robin Vos appointing a special counsel to use a huge amount of taxpayer dollars, $1.3 million to run a sham investigation into the 2020 election. And then as soon as Robin Vos had won his Republican primary, firing that investigator that says that we're facing a Republican Party that is willing to sell anything in order to hold on to power, even embracing lies that are dangerous to democracy itself. I want to wake up in the morning knowing that my governor, that the leaders in my state are there to represent all the people of Wisconsin, not just their own political careers. And when politicians are only out for themselves, everyone else pays the price.

[00:09:07] **Speaker 1** We have seen a boost in the number of Republicans specifically who are turning out to volunteer at election sites and polling sites. Be an observer. Is that good? Will they be more likely than to believe in the system that they've witnessed firsthand? Or is there a danger that they could, whether intentionally screw things up, but raise more objections and and make things more difficult for voters on Election Day?

[00:09:31] **Speaker 2** Wisconsin election law is very clear. It is a felony to intimidate voters. It's very clear that to faithfully execute the laws. You have to count every vote that you can't break into. Voting machines request other people's ballots, and it's critical that we enforce those laws. There are people who, frankly, I don't think have great intentions, who want to mess with things. But what we've seen is that poll workers in Wisconsin, the clerks who are elected and appointed across our state, they are faithful public servants. Wisconsin has some of the cleanest, most secure elections in the country. And the closer someone gets to that system, the more they actually learn about how effective our election systems are. So I have every confidence we will have a free, fair and secure election this fall. What I'm concerned about is people trying to mess with the system or to get power so that they can break that system and and upend our our tradition of clean democracy in Wisconsin. That's why it's so critical that everyone vote this fall. And I hope that folks volunteer and get involved in the process because these elections could be some of the most consequential of our lifetime.

[00:10:32] **Speaker 1** You referenced Robin Vos and the mike gave him an investigation. There is Office of Special Counsel. We saw a lot of Republicans talking and boosting up the idea of the integrity of the elections and whatnot. And that's kind of disappeared. And there was a question earlier is like, is that all cynical or how many of them actually believe what they're saying? Have we learned anything about whether it was civics or politics by their silence now or how much is being played up?

[00:10:56] **Speaker 2** Can I ask a question? I, I don't have any salad in my mouth or teeth right now. Okay. So your question is, have we learned anything about whether this was just cynical politics or what? Yeah. At this moment, Republican politicians in Wisconsin, I think, are realizing as they see that they're behind in the polls, as they see that the enthusiasm to vote among people who want to throw them out of office is growing. They're realizing that they may have gone too far. The question is, if they get power, what will they do? And we know the answer because we've seen it for the last two years. Republicans have passed bill after bill after bill to suppress votes to partizan lines and change election administration systems. The Republican candidate for governor, Tim Michaels, has vowed to scrap our bipartisan system of overseeing elections. I have no doubt that he will want to keep that campaign promises if he gets power. So even though they may not be advertising the fact that they're taking some of the most extreme positions that we see across the country right here in Wisconsin, I hope that voters realize the danger that we're in. If the politicians who want to rig the system instead of serving the public get control of our state.

[00:12:05] **Speaker 1** One other issue that's resonating with a lot of people is the Dobbs decision. What have you seen in terms of enthusiasm or maybe even volunteers that haven't worked, volunteered on a campaign? What's changed since then?

[00:12:17] **Speaker 2** Watching the U.S. Supreme Court with Republican appointees just shred a basic freedom that Wisconsinites have counted on for half a century has been horrifying. And for many, many voters, especially women across the state, it has been something that has galvanized a level of kind of political outrage and commitment to change that will reshape this election this fall. Governor Evers was very clear. He has committed to granting clemency to any doctors who are prosecuted under Wisconsin's pre-Civil War abortion ban. Attorney General Kaul has said he will not divert resources from public safety to to prosecuting doctors. Enforcing this archaic ban. And the governor and our attorney general have sued to strike down the ban, which, frankly, should not be in effect given that other laws were passed after it which superseded Republicans seem ready to do everything they can to throw people in jail for for trying to exercise the freedom that they have to do things to have control over their own bodies or physicians who provide those kinds of services. I think that the fight over whether Wisconsinites should have the freedom to make their own decisions about whether to start a family, when to start a family, that fight will change how this election operates. It will change who votes. And frankly, the pro-freedom candidates on the ballot are far more likely to win.

[00:13:40] **Speaker 1** Are you seeing that as an age or generational level as well? Obviously, there's women that have known these rights their entire lives versus younger women who may be first time voters who are seeing this change happen right in front of them.

[00:13:53] **Speaker 2** For relatively new voters, this is such a slap in the face, really a shock of seeing something that has been a guaranteed right, a constitutionally guaranteed right. Their whole lives suddenly taken away for older voters of reproductive freedom is something that they remember when it wasn't there. And so seeing this fight that was fought 50 years ago, suddenly back on the front pages, you know, people who are well past the point of having kids themselves now are seeing their their granddaughters, their grandkids facing the loss of reproductive freedom. They're infuriated, too. If you knock on doors in rural Wisconsin, in suburbs, in cities alike, there are people even who voted Republican before who think this is much too far. And when they see the video of Tim Michaels saying that he does not support even exceptions for cases of rape or incest, it's horrifying. That is not someone you want to have in the governor's mansion.

[00:14:46] **Speaker 1** There's been a lot of talk that, oh, for this class or this area or these suburbs or suburban moms, soccer moms or they're the ones most likely to vote on this issue. But it may not play as well in rural or outstate. Or does it break down geographically that way?

[00:15:00] **Speaker 2** I think this is an issue that is spurring an enormous gender gap in the way that people are motivated to vote and ready to vote. Frankly, I think people of all genders should should vote for freedom and to ensure that all of us have the power to make our own decisions about our own bodies. But what we don't see is some giant chasm between cities or suburbs or rural areas. People everywhere want these basic freedoms in their in their lives. And I think politicians who think that they can cynically exploit divisions or the faith of their supporters in a way that allows them to attack the basic freedoms and rights of Wisconsinites across the board. Politicians like that have no business in public life.

[00:15:41] **Speaker 1** One of the big issues in the governor's race is going to have to do with education. Obviously, Tony Evers has his background firmly planted in education. He's been pretty clear with his budgets with where he would like to see the state go. Tim Michaels says he wants to break up Milwaukee schools and universal school choice. How much will that with all the other issues playing out in this election, will that actually swing voters or motivate certain classes of voters?

[00:16:04] **Speaker 2** Governor Evers often says what's best for our kids is what's best for the state. He's a lifelong educator, both as a teacher and a principal, as superintendent, as the head of the Department of Public Instruction. He believes in public schools down to his bones. And frankly, most Wisconsinites, due to public schools, are one of the most profoundly popular and important institutions in our state. They've shaped almost everyone's lives, including mine. And with Tim Michaels running essentially against public schools, that is a losing proposition for him. Anyone who's gone to a public school wants to send their kids to a public school. Or who who's ever thought about public school recognizes it's the basis of democracy. It's the basis of prosperity. These are not institutions that should be attacked. We shouldn't be demonizing parents and teachers in the schools that they that they teach in and send their kids to. So I do think that education is a voting issue this fall, and I think that supports the education governor Governor Evers, who has demonstrated his effectiveness to supporting students and parents and teachers and will do so again for four more years.

[00:17:05] **Speaker 1** We saw a Republican playbook, especially in Virginia, talking about the WOKENESS and CRT, and we've seen some of that in Michael's stump speech. And Rebecca Kleefisch tried to play on that as well. How much does that resonate with voters? Does that actually reach down into like into the home as like understanding what that means?

[00:17:24] **Speaker 2** You know, I was on parent teacher conferences earlier today and we talked to the teacher about reading and about math and whether we're ready for chapter books and second grade. That is the stuff that the teachers are teaching to students and talking to parents about. And parents recognize that there's a right wing playbook that tries to divide people, to make people distracted and afraid, divide people by race. But frankly, whether you're white or black or brown, no matter what language you speak at home, all of us want our kids to get a great education. And that's what Wisconsin public schools can provide. So the Republican attacks on schools that ultimately. The lead to what Tim Michaels is proposing, big cuts to public school funds. Those things don't really fly in Wisconsin. And we saw that in so many school board races this spring and we'll see it this fall.

[00:18:09] **Speaker 1** Also, Michael Stump speech where he's talking about Milwaukee. He's he's having some specific stories and he's generalizing a lot of things about black Wisconsinites from Milwaukee and how they can't read. They can't write. And it's all the public schools fault. And that leads to crime and all the other problems. How how close does that veer into racism and looking past all of the institutional racism that exists within that area, that is stereotyping.

[00:18:35] **Speaker 2** Tim Michaels is using a a extreme right Republican playbook, which is to try to divide people by race in order to to pull money out of services that white, black and brown people alike depend on. It is it is a system that Republican politicians have used in our state and in other states where they cynically try to wield race in order to pull apart voters who have more in common than they do have things that divide them, frankly, across race, across geography and rural and suburban and cities alike. Across Wisconsin, we all want great schools for our kids. We want great roads to drive on. We want clean air and water, and we want family supporting jobs. And when you see someone like Tim Michaels cynically trying to use race to pull people apart, it really hurts our politics. It hurts everyone. It's something we need to come together to reject.

[00:19:24] **Speaker 1** And not least in terms of races, but often overlooked, is the attorney general's race. There was a Republican primary that had Adam Darko as kind of an outlier Eric Toni Fitz, a more traditional Republican attorney general candidate mode. Do you think this race will get enough attention for people to look at it on its own merits?

[00:19:41] **Speaker 2** When I look at the attorney general's race, I see Josh Kaul, who's very clear about defending democracy, defending public safety, and ensuring that the Department of Justice doesn't become a hammer to prosecute physicians about supporting families, making their own decisions. And on the Republican side, a candidate who has shown that he's willing to do and say anything in order to get power. He has started prosecuting people based on ridiculous claims about their voting behavior. He's promising to pull funds from public safety in order to enforce this pre-Civil War abortion ban instead of doing what Attorney General Call does, which is to following the law, following the will of people in the state, sued to try to overturn that almost total ban on abortion. So I think with Tony, what we're seeing is the kind of opportunistic, extreme Republican politics that voters across our state reject.

[00:20:34] **Speaker 1** Is it difficult to pigeonhole him as extreme when there was someone who was arguably more extreme that he defeated in the primary?

[00:20:42] **Speaker 2** Unfortunately, in this day and age, it's almost always possible to find someone more extreme than a given politician. The question is, if you look at what most Wisconsinites care about and what they want from their attorney general, they want someone who understands and cares about public safety, who understands that we need working families, need someone who will stick up to them against big companies, like the manufacturers of opioids who try to prey on the public, who understands that we don't want the government of our state going around jailing doctors for helping families make some of the most supporting them in some of the most intimate and personal moments of their lives. So I think that Tony's positions on all these questions are really are extreme. Even if it's possible to see where the distance something even more further to the fringe.

[00:21:28] **Speaker 1** One of the things that I think a lot of people lose sight of with the attorney general is the ability to bring and represent the state in national lawsuits against the federal government. How much would how our state is perceived nationally or how we're involved nationally matter if we changed attorney generals, the parties.

[00:21:43] **Speaker 2** When Josh Kaul was elected attorney general, he promised that he would withdraw Wisconsin from the lawsuit that tried to strike down the Affordable Care Act, the lawsuit to end protections for people with preexisting conditions. Governor Evers and Josh Kaul and Mandela Barnes were elected Wisconsin, pulled out of that lawsuit and now proudly stands for making sure that everyone, regardless of preexisting conditions, can get the health care that they need. With someone like with someone like Eric Tony. You could imagine Wisconsin once again plunging into divisive attacks on protections and freedoms and rights that people in Wisconsin depend on. On the other side of the coin, Attorney General Kaul has been very clear that he doesn't think that we should take public safety funds and resources of the Department of Justice and use those to attack reproductive freedoms and attack doctors for for supporting people with medical decisions around abortion and health care. Tony seems to think that that is the role of the Department of Justice in Wisconsin. So I think Tony would move us from a place of really supporting the public's priorities and push us more into Republican political games and the kind of stunt lawsuits that we've seen from Republican attorneys general around the country.

[00:22:55] **Speaker 1** There is a history in Wisconsin of voters splitting their vote between. Federal and state elections and obviously with the US Senate race. Ron Johns is a two time incumbent and he's been almost nationalizing his attacks on Mandela. BARNES With the defund the police or the squad or other things. Do you think those messages can get through or how does Mandela separate himself from some of those issues for Mandela?

[00:23:16] **Speaker 2** BARNES That the key thing that he spread the word about everywhere he goes and rightly so, is that he is the son of a public school teacher and a third shift auto worker. And he understands how hard Wisconsinites work to support their families and the support that they need no matter where they live in the state. And that is profoundly different from an out-of-touch, self-serving politician like Ron Johnson. What we saw in 2018 is Tammy Baldwin running on a very similar message to do Mandela. Barnes is winning tremendously across Wisconsin. And what we can see right now is that Wisconsinites want someone like Mandela Barnes who fights for them, not someone like Ron Johnson, who is lining his own pockets and enriching his wealthiest donors while threatening to cut Social Security and Medicare and voting against support for Wisconsin communities that working people rely on.

[00:24:03] **Speaker 1** When you look at all those statewide races, do you think there's really any way that any of them split off and could possibly swing the opposite way of the other races? Or do you think they'll usually line up?

[00:24:13] **Speaker 2** What's striking about this year is that all the Republican candidates for statewide office are espousing these really hard right, extreme positions, really in line with Donald Trump's vision for him for where the state should go. And it's maybe not a coincidence that Donald Trump endorsed Ron Johnson before he even announced his candidacy. He endorsed Tim Michaels and did a big rally for him. These are ultra MAGA candidates who are running to take over a state and I think we saw in 2020 and we'll see again. That was hard tonight to reject that kind of extremism. They want people who have common sense, who do the right thing, who stand up for people like that. And that's what we see in our Democratic candidates this year. It's why I'm feeling so strong about how we'll do in November.

[00:24:55] **Speaker 1** Anything else you want to add?

[00:24:57] **Speaker 2** One other thing I'll say. There's one area of the state where there has been a lot of ticket splitting, which is western Wisconsin. And when you look at someone like Derek Van Orden, who's running for the US house, you can see someone that even a lot of Republicans wouldn't feel comfortable voting for. He's on probation right now for trying to bring a loaded gun on a plane. He used his campaign funds to go to the insurrection on January 6th in Washington, D.C.. The idea of him representing Wisconsin in the U.S. House from a purple district like Wisconsin third congressional district, it's really out of step with the history of that district and the spirit of our state.

[00:25:31] **Speaker 1** Four Timing for Ron kind to not have the power of incumbency, but has at least some name recognition in that.

[00:25:38] **Speaker 2** Area, right? Brad Path He is so deeply rooted in the district, which I'm like Derek Van Orden, he's actually from he grew up on a dairy farm outside of lacrosse. He understands agriculture and rural families in general in a way that really comes only from a lifetime of service, like the one that he's led. He's been fighting for the families and part of that district as a state senator, and he'll be a terrific congressman for the third.

[00:26:02] **Speaker 1** All right. That's all we have for you. Thank you for your time. Thank you. Save it. Absolutely. For letting us get in. Get set up.

[00:26:09] **Speaker 2** This is actually just keep this stuff is perfect.

[00:26:11] **Speaker 1** It's nice, isn't it?