

Trump-backed candidate loses in Texas special election

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Texas State Representative Jake Ellzey of Waxahachie beat fellow Republican Susan Wright on Tuesday in a runoff election for Texas's 6th US Congressional District. With all precincts reporting Wednesday morning, Ellzey had received 53 percent of the vote (20,837), while Wright got 47 percent (18,279).

Despite an endorsement from Donald Trump, Wright was not able to secure the seat held by her late husband, US Representative Ron Wright, who died in February after contracting COVID-19 while battling cancer.

Wright campaigned on continuing her late husband's legacy as a staunch conservative. She cited her experience in Texas politics, working for members of the legislature and serving on the state Republican Executive Committee. Ellzey played up his background as a Navy fighter pilot and his tenure in the Texas House.

Trump endorsed Wright in the days leading up to the May 1 special election, issuing at least three statements, purchasing ads, starring in a robocall and headlining a telephone rally for her. Wright finished first in the May 1 election, which had 23 candidates, with 19 percent of the vote. Ellzey came in second with 14 percent, beating Democrat Jana Lynne Sanchez by just 354 votes. Because no candidate secured a majority of the votes, Wright and Ellzey moved on to a runoff election.

Not only did the Democrats fail to advance to the runoff, but their total vote share also dropped as compared to last November's presidential election when Joe Biden captured 48 percent of the vote in the district. The 10 Democratic candidates combined were able to secure only 37 percent of the ballots cast.

The north Texas district, which spans the southern suburbs of the Dallas-Fort Worth region, used to be a Republican stronghold, but has shifted to being more

competitive in recent years. Trump won the district by 12 percent in 2016, but that lead shrank to just three percentage points in last year's election.

Trump's endorsement was considered paramount to securing a win between the Republican candidates. A poll by the University of Texas at Austin showed Trump's favorability rating among Texas Republicans to be about 86 percent. Last election cycle, all but one of the Texas Republicans he endorsed in congressional races were victorious.

While campaigning, both Wright and Ellzey embraced Trump's political agenda. Both championed finishing the border wall, "preserving election integrity," and standing up for law enforcement among their top priorities, differing only in their sources of funding and political alliances.

Ellzey actively sought the support of the "MAGA" crowd. He released a video titled "Trump Supporters Love Jake Ellzey" and attended Trump's and Texas Governor Greg Abbott's border visit last month. He collected the support of numerous high-profile Texas Republicans, including former Governor Rick Perry and Representative Dan Crenshaw. Both have close ties to Trump.

Tuesday morning, the Club for Growth, an anti-tax group, said it had poured \$1.2 million into Wright's campaign. But Ellzey outraised her throughout the campaign, bringing in \$1.7 million by early July compared to Wright's \$740,000. The latest campaign finance reports, covering April 12 through July 7, show that Ellzey nearly tripled Wright's fundraising, \$1.23 million to \$454,000.

Much of Ellzey's outside funding came from the Elect Principled Veterans Fund, a super PAC that popped up earlier this year to support him in the May 1 special election. The Federal Election Commission

revealed that the political action committee has gotten all its funding from the With Honor Fund, a national super PAC that backs veterans running for office.

The veteran also benefited from Democrats who voted in the runoff for the purpose of rebuffing the Trump-endorsed candidate. Though the runoff was between two Republican candidates, it was a special election open to all voters in the district. The 2020 Democratic nominee for the seat, Stephen Daniel, announced Monday that he would vote for Ellzey in the runoff, saying Democrats “may be the deciding factor in this election, and we need to do everything we can to make sure the Trump-endorsed Susan Wright loses.”

Considering the low voter turnout—just 39,116 people cast a ballot in the runoff election, compared to nearly 330,000 who voted in the same district last November—the Democrats’ intervention played a pivotal role in Ellzey’s victory. In their attempt to snub Trump’s pick, the Texas Democrats helped elevate a candidate who is no less reactionary.



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