

Latest primaries tighten Trump's control over Republican Party

Patrick Martin
10 August 2022

Primaries in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Connecticut and Vermont Tuesday further cemented ex-president Donald Trump's control over the Republican Party, as his endorsed candidates won contested nominations for governor of Wisconsin and US senator from Connecticut, as well as in several other races.

In addition, after protracted vote-counting in the state of Washington, Republican Representative Jaime Herrera Beutler, one of 10 Republicans who voted to impeach Trump for the attack on the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, conceded that she had lost her race for reelection. Beutler finished a close third in the state's all-party primary August 2 and was eliminated, as far-right Republican Joe Kent, a former Green Beret, took second place by a margin of 928 votes and will face Democrat Marie Perez in the November general election.

Beutler played a significant role in the events of January 6, besides her subsequent vote to impeach Trump. As the mob was storming the Capitol, she witnessed and partly overheard a phone conversation between House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy and Trump, in which McCarthy demanded Trump call off the attack, to which Trump replied that the attackers evidently cared more about the 2020 presidential election than McCarthy did.

The congresswoman offered to testify during the Senate trial of Trump, but the House Democrats who were managing the case refused to call her as a witness. Indeed, they refused to call any witnesses at all, helping facilitate the cover-up of the attack.

The Republican Party continues to evolve in a distinctly fascist direction, but neither the Democratic Party nor corporate America care to discuss this political reality. Instead, the Biden administration pleads for bipartisan collaboration with its "Republican colleagues," while the media portrays the contests as driven largely by personalities—Trump vs. former Vice President Mike Pence or other rivals for the 2024 Republican nomination.

Primary contests in Wisconsin show the impact of Trump's endorsement. Construction boss Tim Michels defeated former Lieutenant Governor Rebecca Kleefisch by a margin of 51 percent to 47 percent, although Kleefisch had the support of the entire party establishment, including former Governor Scott Walker, as well as Pence and Senator Ted Cruz. Michels will

face incumbent Democrat Tony Evers, who defeated Walker in 2018.

Michels is a wealthy, self-funded candidate, co-owner of the state's largest construction company, which had been awarded a contract for building the Keystone XL pipeline by the Trump administration before it was halted under Biden. He had few policy differences with Kleefisch. The two candidates both traveled to Mar-a-Lago to seek Trump's endorsement, which went to Michels.

According to the *New York Times*, their attitude to the "stop the steal" campaign played a role in Trump's decision. "Ms. Kleefisch had been slightly less receptive to the former president's calls to upend Wisconsin's certified 2020 election results," the newspaper reported.

Kleefisch denounced the 2020 election as "rigged," but subscribed to the view that it was too late to do anything to rescind Wisconsin's certification of Biden's narrow victory by 10,000 votes. Michels did not openly reject that possibility.

In a particularly striking outcome, Wisconsin House Speaker Robin Vos, the most powerful Republican elected official in the state, only narrowly won renomination from his district after Trump endorsed his previously unknown opponent, Adam Steen. Trump fell out with Vos over the latter's refusal to support further investigations into the outcome of the 2020 presidential vote in Wisconsin.

In Minnesota, advocates of conspiracy theories won Republican nominations for statewide office.

Scott Jensen, a physician and a former state senator, won the nomination to face incumbent Democratic Governor Tim Walz. Jensen has openly challenged coronavirus mitigation efforts and even the efficacy of vaccines.

Kim Crockett, who called the 2020 election "rigged" and campaigned with election denialists, won the nomination for secretary of state, the top state election official.

In Connecticut, in the contest for a US Senate nomination, Leora Levy, a far-right Trump fanatic, defeated Themis Klarides, a supposedly "moderate" Republican who had won the endorsement of the party's state convention. Trump endorsed her and hailed her upset victory, although Levy is a heavy underdog to incumbent Democrat Richard Blumenthal.

Jaime Herrera Beutler's defeat in Washington makes her the

seventh of the 10 Republican representatives who voted for impeachment to see their congressional careers end. Four retired rather than seek reelection, while three have so far been defeated in primaries: Tom Rice in South Carolina, Peter Meijer in Michigan, and now Beutler.

Only two of the 10 representatives have made it to the general election, David Valadao in California and Dan Newhouse in Washington, and neither was the target of a significant effort by Trump to purge them from the party.

The 10th Republican impeachment voter is Liz Cheney, vice chair of the House Select Committee investigating the January 6 attack, and Trump's biggest target for revenge. She is expected to lose her race for renomination in the Wyoming primary set for next Tuesday, August 16.

In the Democratic Party primaries, there were continuing contests between the party establishment and candidates backed by or allied with Senator Bernie Sanders (who is himself increasingly integrated into the party hierarchy in the Senate).

In Vermont, Sanders' pick to fill the state's lone House seat, State Senate President Pro Tempore Becca Balint, defeated Lieutenant Governor Molly Gray, who had the backing of Vermont's other Senate Democrat, Patrick Leahy. Incumbent Representative Peter Welch is running to fill the Senate vacancy due to the retirement of Leahy, now 82. Sanders, at 80, will finally become Vermont's senior senator, and if Democrats retain control of the Senate he will continue to head the Senate Budget Committee.

In Minnesota, all incumbent Democrats who sought renomination won their primaries, but the margin for Representative Ilhan Omar was surprisingly narrow, just 50-48 over former city councilman Don Samuels. Omar has been targeted for her criticism of Israel and her role in the so-called squad of "left" representatives, including Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Rashida Tlaib, Cori Bush and Ayanna Pressley.

There were two sets of ballots cast in Minnesota's First Congressional District, which includes a tier of counties in the southern part of the state, along the border with Iowa. The first was an all-party special election to fill the remainder of the term of Republican Representative Jim Hagedorn, who died of cancer in February. The second was the primary contest to choose Democratic and Republican nominees for the same seat for the full term that begins next January.

Former state legislator and Trump administration official Brad Finstad won the special election narrowly over Democrat Jeff Ettinger, 51 to 47 percent, in a district that Trump carried by 10 points in 2020. Finstad and Ettinger each won their party's nomination for the November general election. The main significance of this contest is the identity of the Democratic nominee: Ettinger is the former CEO of Hormel Foods, the company that smashed a bitter strike by meatpacking workers at its Austin plant in the congressional district in 1985-86.

The unionbusting was made possible by Democratic

Governor Rudy Perpich, who called out the National Guard to escort scabs into the plant, and by the United Food and Commercial Workers international union, which deregistered the militant Local P-9, victimized the local union leadership, and chartered a new union local consisting of the scabs who crossed the picket line.

Ettinger was in law school at the time of the P-9 strike, but he went to work at Hormel shortly afterwards and was promoted quickly through the ranks of management by the executives who had carried out the strikebreaking. He became general counsel and then president and CEO (2005-2016), before taking a golden parachute and entering Democratic Party politics.

Ettinger self-funded his campaign, effectively buying the Democratic nomination, and given the close result in the low-turnout special election, where he outspen Finstad, could well win the seat in the fall.

The Democrats seem likely to lose one House seat in Wisconsin, where 13-term incumbent Ron Kind is retiring from a rural and small-town district in the southwestern portion of the state. Republican Derrick Van Orden, a retired Navy SEAL, who lost only narrowly to Kind in 2020, was unopposed for the party nomination. The Republican-controlled state legislature redrew the district's borders to make it more favorable to their party, effectively forcing Kind to retire, and Van Orden is now favored to win that seat.

The other main statewide contest in Wisconsin is for the US Senate seat held by Republican Ron Johnson, a diehard reactionary and Trump supporter, and a self-funded multi-millionaire who is one of the richest men in the Senate. The Democratic nomination went to Lieutenant Governor Mandela Barnes, who became the favorite after his major rivals withdrew one by one during July, citing his lead in the pre-primary polls.

Barnes is being heavily promoted in the corporate media and by both the party establishment and the Sanders wing as a candidate in the mold of Barack Obama: African-American, relatively young, given to "left" rhetoric, but advocating policies that are absolutely conventional and pro-capitalist.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact