



## MEMO

**To:** WI State Senators, Senators-elect and Staff

**From:** Andrew Whitley, SSDC Executive Director

**Cc:** Matthew Ullsvik, Anson Kaye, Morton Brilliant, Aviva Bowen, Lance Greenberg, Oren Savir, Bryan Stryker, Peter Cari

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**Summary:** We had 5 targeted seats (1 defend and 4 flip opportunities) and ran the table winning all 5 in a very difficult political environment nationally and in Wisconsin — outperforming Harris and/or Baldwin in 4 of the 5 districts. As a result of our success, Democrats are now only 2 seats away from controlling the state Senate going into the 2026 mid-term elections with Trump in the White House. The following memo seeks to provide an analytical overview of our 2024 targets, specifically looking at trends in Senate Districts 08, 14, 18, 30, and 32 and how our Senate Democratic candidates were able to defy national trends and secure victory. Additionally, we will look ahead to 2026 and examine electoral results in Senate Districts 05, 17, 21, 25, and 31.

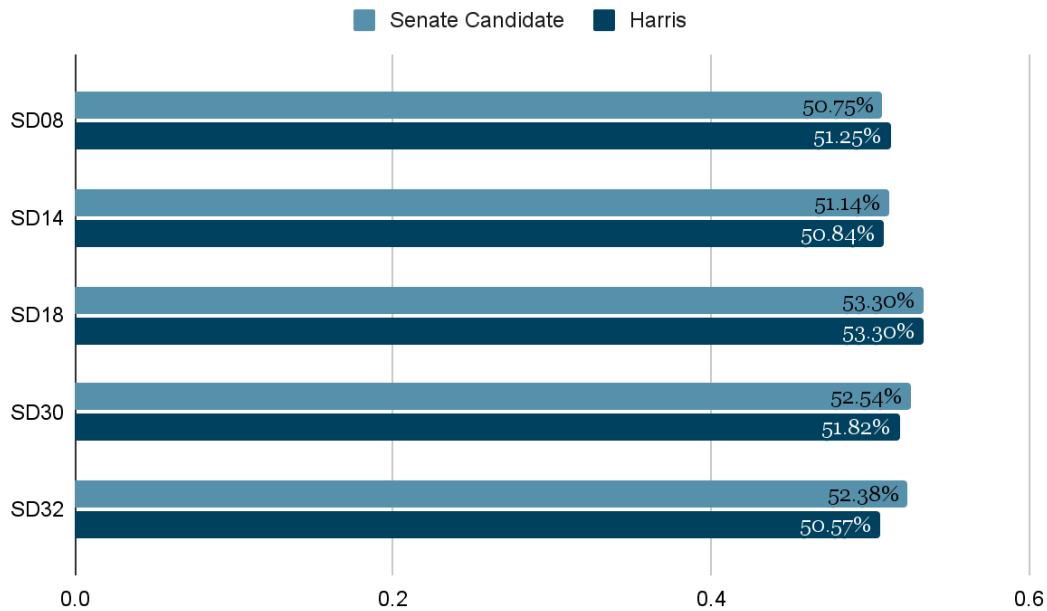
### Keys to Success:

- 1). Candidate Recruitment: We were very intentional to recruit candidates that were good fits for each respective district who worked very hard and were 100% bought into the SSDC and our overall campaign strategy.
- 2). Win some Trump Voters: In the most contested districts we needed to pick up some Trump voters to win. We knew this and targeted these voters while always communicating with our base.
- 3). Targeting Resources: Over all, we enjoyed a large spending advantage over the Republicans (more than 2:1) but we did not spend equally among all 5 targets. To run the table, we invested disproportionately more resources into SD 8 and 14 and kept pace with Republican spending in the other 3 districts. The spending disparity allowed us to heavily communicate with our base and go after Trump voters where we enjoy a spending advantage in our two most competitive districts - SD 8 (more than 3:1) and SD 14 (more than 2:1).
- 4). Aggressive messaging: We leaned into abortion to pick up and hold the votes aligned with Harris but we used our resource advantage to run second message tracks that were aimed at picking up Trump voters. (Subsequent sections go into more detail.)

5). Polling: We aggressively polled all these districts and were in the field to see when the Harris campaign began to slip which told us we needed to secure our base AND go after ticket splitters. While we spent more on polling than the original budget forecast, we believe this added polling allowed us to be nimble and adjust our strategy once we saw top of the ticket (both Harris and Baldwin) would have no coattails and may even be a drag.

6). New Wisconsin Majority: Among other important independent groups, New Wisconsin Majority (a Senate allied 527 organization) brought significant funding and paid media throw weight behind abortion and other messaging that provided an important extra lane of communication to voters.

### 2024 DISTRICT BY DISTRICT ANALYSIS



**Senate District 08:** Jodi Habush Sinykin was one of only two Senate candidates of the 5 targets that outperformed President Biden’s margins from four years prior (the other being Jamie Wall), specifically in the deeply conservative WOW counties of Washington, Ozaukee, and Waukesha. She outperformed 2020 margins by 1.93% in Ozaukee, 1.92% in Washington, and 1.63% in Waukesha. She also was one of three candidates to outperform Senator Baldwin doing so by .44%.

**Senate District 14:** Sarah Keyeski carried the 14th by 2.2%, while Kamala Harris won by 1.6%. Additionally, Sarah outperformed 2020 margins in the most conservative portions of the district. In Adams County she ran 3.29% higher than the 2020 margin, in Vernon 2.94% higher, in Juneau just .09% lower than President Biden's 2020 margins and in Richland just .64% lower.

**Senate District 18:** Despite being outspent, Kris Alfheim was still able to narrowly outpace the Vice President Harris' margin within the district.

**Senate District 30:** Jamie Wall was the only candidate that outperformed President Biden's margins and ran ahead of both Vice President Harris and Senator Baldwin. He ran ahead of 2020 margins by nearly 1% point. And outperformed Kamala Harris by 179 votes and Tammy Baldwin by 336 votes. Additionally Jamie ran ahead of Assembly candidates in the district (326 votes ahead Chrisy Welch, 266 votes ahead of Ryan Spaude, and 1152 votes ahead of Rivera).

**Senate District 32:** Brad Pfaff over-performed Vice President Harris by nearly 2 percentage points (1.75%) and Senator Baldwin by nearly 1 percentage point (.89%). While he overperformed the top of the ticket in every locality, Brad saw his largest overperformance in Vernon County, outperforming Senator Baldwin by 1.59% and Vice President Harris by 3.15%.

## **MESSAGE ANALYSIS**

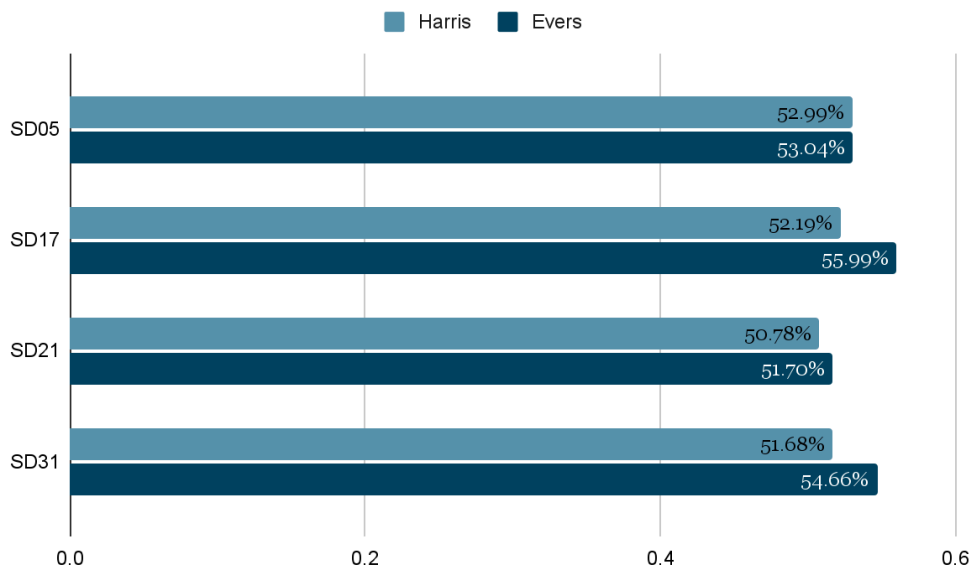
Senate Democratic candidates were able to withstand a difficult national environment last Tuesday, in many cases overperforming the top of the ticket. One of the more important elements to that is how our team positioned our candidates, particularly our candidates in Senate Districts 08, 14, and 30.

In each race, we had the resources (thanks in large part to historic investment from DPW) to expand paid messaging beyond the vitally important abortion negatives and reach voters who needed additional or different reasons to oppose the Republicans and support our candidates. We were able to message not just to Democratic-leaning voters, but to Republican-leaning voters as well, whether that be [on taxes in the case of Jim Rafter](#), [defunding police pensions in the case of Duey Stroebel](#), or [voting against Made in Wisconsin legislation in the case of Joan Ballweg](#).

Note: the suggestion of some Wisconsin Republicans that abortion is not a winning message anymore couldn't be further from the truth. Abortion was a needed component of our winning message. Republicans' refusal to acknowledge that is short sighted and wrong.

## **OUR PATHWAY TO THE MAJORITY IN 2026**

There are four districts that will be critical to our pathway to the majority in 2026. All four of these districts were won by both Vice President Harris and Senator Baldwin in 2024, Governor Evers in 2022, and President Biden in 2020. History suggests we should be able to expand our margins in these districts with a Republican in the White House. Lastly, the team that produced the results above will stay intact – meaning candidate recruitment and fundraising for the cycle to come begins now.



**Senate District 5:** This suburban Milwaukee seat was won by Vice President Harris by six points and Tammy Baldwin by 5 points. It shifted even further to the left compared to four years prior when President Biden took 51.57% of the vote.

**Senate District 17:** Anchored in Southwest Wisconsin, this largely rural district includes portions of Dane County. It's a very reliable Democratic district, with 52.6% of the district voting for President Biden in 2020. Governor Evers won the district by 10 points in 2022. Vice President Harris took 52.2% of the vote and Senator Baldwin took 52.4%.

**Senate District 21:** Senate District 21 is the closest of all the seats up in 2026. This district includes southern Milwaukee and goes south to include the City of Racine. Vice President Harris took 50.78% while Senator Baldwin took 50.19% of the vote. Two years prior, Governor Evers won the district with 51.7% of the vote and President Biden, in 2020, took 51.17%.

**Senate District 31:** This Eau Claire-based seat is our only defend of the 2026 cycle, with Senator Jeff Smith currently holding the seat. The Vice President took 51.7% of the vote and Senator Baldwin took 52.6%. Governor Evers, in 2022, nearly won by 10 points, securing 54.6% of the vote. And in 2020 President Biden won the seat with 51.72% of the vote.

**In Closing:** Thanks to the strength of our candidates and the unique way our team tackled messaging in each individual district, Senate Democrats were able to defy national odds and sweep all five of our races. Additionally, despite the Republican wave of 2024, all four of our target districts next year voted for both Vice President Harris and Senator Baldwin. Make no mistake, Senate Democrats are poised to win the majority in 2026.