Another Democrat primary shaping up in Wisconsin’s 3rd Congressional District

By WisPolitics.com  
  
When Ron Kind, the veteran Democratic member of Congress from La Crosse retired from office, Democrats battled in a primary to vie for the nomination to run in the November 2022 to succeed him.  
  
State Sen. Brad Pfaff, D-Onalaska, the candidate coming from the traditional heart of the district,  
emerged the winner then lost to the GOP's Derrick Van Orden of Prairie du Chien, amid complaints from the Pfaff camp that national Democrats abandoned him down the stretch.  
  
Now another Democratic primary is shaping up for 2024 as Democrats gear up to try to knock off the freshman Republican, who early on tacked to the middle before getting caught up in a controversy over profanely scolding interns in the Capitol.  
  
This time, another state lawmaker has entered the field – Katrina Shankland of Stevens Point.  
  
But coming from the far outreaches of the district, will she still be in the district when the election rolls around?  
  
Shankland formally announced her bid for the GOP-held seat, becoming the fourth candidate to get into the race. Insiders are really only focused on three of them. And those three just happen to hail from very different parts of the district now held by Van Orden.  
  
Nonprofit owner Rebecca Cooke, who finished second in the Democratic primary last year, hails from Eau Claire, while former La Crosse County Board Chair Tara Johnson is from the most populated part of the seat.  
  
Still, insiders wonder how much geography will matter. Maybe it’s less about where you’re from than how much money you can raise and how much you can introduce yourself to voters in other parts of the district.  
  
Shankland has performed well in her Stevens Point-based seat, and she rolled out several union endorsements. The Progressive Change Campaign Committee also backs its former staffer, its first endorsement of a House challenger for the 2024 cycle.  
  
Not a bad start, Democrats say.  
  
But being from the northeastern corner of the district means she’s going to have to put on a lot of miles to get in front of voters in Eau Claire and La Crosse unless she can raise the kind of coin that puts effective ad buys on the air.  
  
Cooke, meanwhile, announces she raised more than $400,000 during her first quarter in the race. Insiders note that’s a nice number, especially after she pulled in just over $453,000 for her entire  
campaign in 2022.  
  
Johnson, who formally announced her campaign in early September, will only have a few weeks of fundraising to report when FEC filings are due Oct. 15. The timing of her entry makes it a little tough to put up a number that stands up well next to Cooke’s, some say.  
  
Meanwhile, Republicans or Van Orden aren’t worried at this point. The freshman does, though, have other things to worry about, like the dysfunction in his caucus. Former House Speaker Kevin McCarthy,  
R-Calif., had pretty good fundraising chops, and it remains to be seen if the person picked to replace him can keep up the pace. Van Orden has gotten his own fundraising legs under him and had more than $1 million in the bank to end June. Still, having a powerhouse fundraiser leading the caucus makes it easier for everyone, some note.  
  
Legislatively, it’s anyone’s guess how the House GOP caucus will function after Republican leaders relied on Demcratss to push through a continuing resolution to avoid a shutdown of the federal government. The five-year Farm Bill expired at the close of September, though key programs remain funded through the end of the year. Van Orden has sought to position himself as an ag champion in the House, touting the fact he’s the first Wisconsin lawmaker to serve on the House Agriculture Committee in nearly a decade.  
  
It was a great spot for him to land, insiders say. But what good does it do him if the House GOP can’t get its stuff together and start passing some bills?  
  
Meanwhile, Shankland will be keeping an eye on whether Democrats file a lawsuit seeking to have the state Supreme Court’s liberal majority redraw the congressional districts. Some assume one is coming, though the suits seeking to throw out the current state legislative lines have been the priority.  
  
But if one does make it before the justices and a new map is in place for next fall, there’s a very real chance Shankland could be drawn out of the district. Should that happen, she’d have to consider moving  
into the newly drawn district — and run the risk of being labeled a carpetbagger.

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