

[COVID-19: Vaccine news and outbreak updates. Subscribe now.](#)

SUBSCRIBER EXCLUSIVE 🔒

Why this N.J. congressman keeps voting against big bills he'd sponsored

Updated Apr 11, 2021; Posted Apr 11, 2021



Rep. Jeff Van Drew acknowledges President Donald Trump during a rally at the Wildwoods Convention Center on Jan. 28, 2020. Aristide Economopoulos | NJ Advance Media

By [Jonathan D. Salant](#) | [NJ Advance Media for NJ.com](#)

When the U.S. House in March 2019 passed [far-reaching ethics legislation](#) to expand voter registration, mandate that presidential candidates release their tax returns, end partisan gerrymandering, and match small-dollar donations to candidates, New Jersey Rep. Jeff Van Drew co-sponsored the bill and voted yes.

“This reform bill will clean up corruption in Washington, restore our democracy, and promote bipartisanship,” Van Drew said [at the time](#). “We need to restore our democracy to a government of the people, by the people, and for the people.”

When the House passed [a near-identical bill](#) last month after the first one failed in the Senate, Van Drew voted no.

“We were warned for years about the rise of socialism,” Van Drew said [on the House floor](#). “Here it is served on a platter, using your money to pay for politicians’ campaigns.

“This bill puts Washington, D.C., in charge of our states’ elections and how those elections are run.”

The bill hadn’t changed. Van Drew’s views of it did, along with his party affiliation. He was a co-sponsor when he was a Democrat, and vehemently opposed it [after switching parties](#) to become a Republican.

Van Drew, who represents New Jersey’s 2nd congressional district, also reversed course on legislation to [expand background checks](#) for gun purchases, to allow dreamers [to remain in the country](#) legally, and to ban discrimination against LGBTQ Americans.

These were among the top legislative priorities of the newly minted House Democratic majority in 2019, and Van Drew [co-sponsored every one](#).

“There is a difference between bills that you vote on and bills that you co-sponsor,” said John Froomjian, executive director of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton University.

“Sometimes you have to take one for the team and vote for a bill that you may not completely agree with. But it’s a different story when you cosponsor a bill. If the congressman cosponsors, he made a judgment at that time that this is what his district wants and it was good politics for him personally. You really wonder what happened since.”

Van Drew, who switched parties after refusing to vote for then-President Donald Trump’s first impeachment, did not respond to a dozen requests for comment made over two weeks.

From D.C. to Trenton to your town, the N.J. Politics newsletter brings the news right to your inbox.

Sign up with your email here:

Even after [joining the Republicans](#) and being feted by Trump [at a Wildwood rally](#), Van Drew still declared his independence from his new colleagues. He [deviated from the GOP party line in 2020](#) more often than any House Republican except for Reps. Brian Fitzpatrick, R-Pa., and Chris Smith,

R-4th Dist.

Even this year, Van Drew was one of only three Republicans (Smith and Fitzpatrick were the others) to co-sponsor legislation ensuring equal pay for women. In 2019, Van Drew co-sponsored the bill as a Democrat and Smith was the only GOP lawmaker whose name was on the legislation.

But his South Jersey district was one of only two in the state where Trump received more than 50% of the vote (Smith's was the other). That helped him repel a well-financed challenge from educator Amy Kennedy of the iconic Democratic political family in one of the nation's hottest congressional races.

After the election, Van Drew joined failed efforts by a majority of House Republicans and supported Trump's bogus claims of voter fraud by asking the U.S. Supreme Court to throw out millions of votes and overturn the presidential election, and then by voting to reject state-certified electoral votes cast for Joe Biden on Jan. 6 after the Capitol insurrection by Trump supporters. (Smith opposed both efforts.)

"He's clearly putting party ahead of everything, which he sees as a path towards retaining his seat," said Ashley Koning, an assistant research professor and director of Rutgers University's Eagleton Center for Public Interest Polling.

"Maybe he decided the district has turned more conservative, more Republican and more Trumpy," Froomjian said.

Republicans praised Van Drew, with state GOP Executive Director Tom Szymanski touting the "outstanding job he is doing fighting for South Jersey families and small businesses."

Whatever Van Drew is doing appears to be working, political observers said. When the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee last week announced its initial list of House Republicans it hopes to oust in 2022, Van Drew's name was missing.

"House Democrats know they can't beat Jeff Van Drew," said Samantha Bullock, a spokeswoman for the National Republican Congressional Committee.

New Jersey State Democrats saw it differently.

"It's no surprise that Jeff Van Drew has continued to sell out his constituents by reversing his positions on these crucial issues to curry favor with the far right, QAnon wing of the Republican Party that he is increasingly aligning himself with," state Democratic spokesman Philip Swibinski said.

"It's the same old story with Van Drew — he only cares about himself and his own political expediency, and New Jersey Democrats are working hard to expose him for the fraud he is and defeat him in 2022."

Republican consultant Mike DuHaime said Van Drew's votes on specific bills may not matter to the constituents he's represented for decades in Trenton and Washington.

“He clearly has his own brand,” DuHaime said. “He won fairly comfortably. All the guy does is win, no matter which party he’s in. Given the slim majority the Democrats have in Congress, I’m not surprised they don’t want to waste money against a guy who has proven that neither party can beat him in a general election.”

Our journalism needs your support. Please subscribe today to [NJ.com](#).

[Jonathan D. Salant](#) may be reached at jsalant@njadvancemedia.com. Follow him at [@JDSalant](#).

Start your day with the latest from Trenton, D.C. and your town. [Get the N.J. Politics newsletter now](#).

Note to readers: if you purchase something through one of our affiliate links we may earn a commission.

Around the web

ADVANCE
LOCAL

Registration on or use of this site constitutes acceptance of our [User Agreement](#), [Privacy Policy](#), and [Cookie Statement](#), and [Your California Privacy Rights](#) (each updated 1/1/21).

[Cookies Settings](#)

© 2021 Advance Local Media LLC. All rights reserved ([About Us](#)).

The material on this site may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, cached or otherwise used, except with the prior written permission of Advance Local.

[Community Rules](#) apply to all content you upload or otherwise submit to this site.

[Ad Choices](#)