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Trump is about to give Jeff Van Drew another reward for his 'loyalty' and 'courage'

by Allison Steele, Posted: August 26, 2020



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President Donald Trump isn't done rewarding Jeff Van Drew for leaving the Democratic Party.

The New Jersey congressman is getting a prime-time speaking slot Thursday during [the Republican National Convention](#) — a nationally televised platform enjoyed by some of Trump's most loyal and well-known supporters.

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It's the latest boost for Van Drew since the longtime Democrat [voted against Trump's impeachment](#) last December, [switched parties](#), and [pledged the president his "undying support."](#) And Trump's continued backing could be crucial to Van Drew's chances for reelection in the battleground South Jersey 2nd Congressional District.

"What we see with Jeff Van Drew is truly historic, and this is a recognition of his loyalty and the courage he had in changing parties," said State Sen. Mike Testa, who cochairs Trump's campaign in New Jersey.

The campaign of Amy Kennedy, the Democratic nominee against Van Drew, dismissed Van Drew's coming RNC appearance as "another political payoff."

"What have the people of South Jersey gotten from his party switch?" asked Josh Roesch, Kennedy's campaign manager. "We have been abandoned and left without a champion during [\[the coronavirus\] crisis](#). Jeff Van Drew joined a party that is trying to take health care away from children and families. He has vigorously defended Trump's response to the pandemic, which has cost millions of jobs and hundreds of thousands of lives, and he has no plan for helping South Jersey's economy recover."

Van Drew aides did not return requests for comment.

The new spotlight for Van Drew comes as he continues to walk something of a political tightrope after his high-profile party switch. The 2nd District encompasses the Philadelphia suburbs in Gloucester County south to Cape May, and runs from north of Atlantic City into Burlington County. Trump carried it by five percentage points in 2016, but Barack Obama twice won more than 50% of the vote.

A state lawmaker for more than 15 years before he was elected to Congress in 2018, Van Drew was long seen as a conservative Democrat. He voted with Trump about 7% of the time before switching parties, and that has only increased to about 12% since then, according to [a tally by the website FiveThirtyEight](#).

He was one of about two dozen Republicans who crossed party lines over the weekend to vote in favor of [an emergency funding bill for the United States Postal Service](#), which Democrats accuse the Trump administration of undermining in a bid to [hobble voting by mail across the country](#). And as the Trump campaign sues New Jersey over Gov. Phil Murphy's decision to [conduct the state's November election mostly by mail](#), Van Drew said he spent a week visiting 20 post offices across South Jersey.

But [his statement](#), released before the vote Saturday, made no mention of concerns over mail voting.

"I visited the hard-working women and men of the USPS this week, and it only galvanized my resolve to ensure they are not used as political pawns," Van Drew said. "We must ensure that they have the resources to deliver during these times to help all Americans receive their mail, which could include medicines or necessary goods."

The nonpartisan Cook Political Report, which tracks federal elections, earlier this month [shifted its rating on the 2nd District](#) from "leans Republicans" to "toss-up." Independents still make up the district's largest voting bloc, but their numbers declined by 11,000 in the last year, while Democrats picked up more voters than Republicans, according to an analysis by the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton University.

Van Drew's defection initially led to a [surge in campaign contributions](#), as well as [a large rally with Trump in Wildwood](#) in January. There, the president praised Van Drew for having "the guts to defy the left-wing fanatics in his own party."

"He supports lower taxes — not bad," Trump said then. "He loves our military, he loves our vets and police. ... He loves your Second Amendment, which is under siege by the Democrats."



Posted: August 26, 2020 - 5:00 AM

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