

WI-03 District Primer

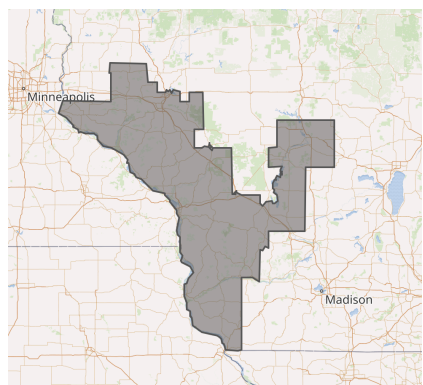
In 2024, Republican Derrick Van Orden won this seat by **11,256 votes**. *That's close!* Dems lost by *two* votes per precinct. If we can persuade just *three* voters per precinct, we can win this year. With your help, we're going to **FLIP** this key seat and secure a Democratic House majority in 2026.

Key dates
Filing Deadline: June 1
Primary: August 11
Midterms: November 3

Recent Election Results [PLEASE UPDATE]

2024 Presidential Election	2024 House Election	2022 House Election
Harris: 191,708 (45.5%) Trump: 222,857 (52.8%)	Van Orden (R): 212,064 (51.3%) Cooke (D): 200,808 (48.6%)	Van Orden (R): 164,743 (51.8%) Pfaff (D): 152,977 (48.1%)

District Facts & Stats



Largest Cities

- Eau Claire: 72,331
- La Crosse: 51,049
- Stevens Point: 25,666

Geography

WI-03 covers the southwest corner of Wisconsin, from Eau Claire in the northeast, to the border of Minnesota in the northwest, where some counties are exurbs of the Twin Cities. The southern part of the district is sandwiched between the Iowa and Illinois state borders. The district — in a region known as the “Driftless Area” — is a sprawling landscape of dairy farms, small manufacturing hubs, and college towns.

Citizenry

Of the district’s 739,000 inhabitants, 373,000 are employed, many of them in manufacturing, trade, construction and transportation. Agriculture is very important even though it employs only 3.3% of WI-03 workers. Incomes are approximately 90% of those in Wisconsin as a whole, and the number of residents below the poverty level is 10% higher. Almost 90% of the population is white.

The Local Vibe

Key local concerns include healthcare, agriculture, local industry, and immigration.

In March, thousands showed up for No Kings protests in Eau Claire; hundreds more attended separate protests in La Crosse and Stevens Point.

Between 60 and 90% of dairy farm workers in the area are undocumented, and some have been seized and deported in ICE raids. The district’s proximity to Minneapolis has also centered immigration as an issue close to home.

Throughout 2025, residents showed up to protest Van Orden for his lack of transparency, and for his unapologetic support of the Big Beautiful Bill’s cuts to healthcare and social programs.

Sign up for another event: mobilize.us/swingleft

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Key Issues

- **Threats to essential services:** Over 20% of the district's residents are enrolled in Medicaid, and nearly 9% receive SNAP benefits. Both of these programs were directly impacted by the Big Beautiful Bill, of which Van Orden was a vocal supporter.
 - **An absentee rep:** Derrick Van Orden has drawn increasing ire from his constituents for his refusal to meet face-to-face, and for his dismissive attitude towards voters as "Soros-funded agitators."
 - **Tariffs:** Farms in the district export primarily to Canada, Mexico, and China; ongoing volatility, rising fertilizer costs, and previous Trump tariffs on milk and soy have significantly impacted the bottom line for Wisconsin farmers.
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About the Candidates

Derrick Van Orden | GOP Incumbent

Born in 1969 in Minnesota, **Derrick Van Orden** joined the Navy at 18, where he served as a SEAL for a 26-year career. After the Navy, Van Orden dabbled in acting before making an unsuccessful run for WI-03 in 2020. Van Orden attended the 2021 "Stop the Steal" rally in Washington and was photographed near the Capitol grounds, but never charged. Following the retirement of long-serving Democratic Representative Ron Kind, Van Orden ran again in 2022, winning in the Biden midterm.

Throughout his two terms in Congress, he has served on the Veterans' Affairs, Agriculture, and Armed Services Committees. He styles himself a member of the "DOGE caucus."

Issues: Despite representing one of the nation's most purple districts, Van Orden has displayed full-throated support of unpopular Trump policies. He campaigned on a pledge to protect benefits like Medicaid, Snap, and WIC, but voted for passage of the Big Beautiful Bill's cuts to all three social programs. He is prolific in his introduction of legislation, some of which serves local interests, but much of which is oriented towards culture war topics (such as his bills to award Congressional Gold Medals to Donald Trump and Charlie Kirk). He has garnered a bipartisan reputation for his juvenile temperament, with widely reported incidents of cursing and shouting at Congressional pages, outbursts during briefings, and inflammatory trolling on Twitter.

Democratic Challenger(s)

There are several possible candidates, but primary polling suggests a clear frontrunner by nearly 45% of the vote:

Rebecca Cooke: A sixth-generation Wisconsinite, Cooke was born and raised on a dairy farm and worked as a waitress and small business owner before her first bid to unseat Van Orden in 2024. She founded a nonprofit that supports female entrepreneurs in western Wisconsin, and has won endorsements for her pragmatic, community-focused platform from the center (Blue Dogs) to the left (Sen. Bernie Sanders). Cooke's campaign is highly focused on working class issues, including farm policy, expanded childcare and other social programs, and expanding access to healthcare through the ACA and Medicare. The DCCC included her in their first cohort of 2026 Red-to-Blue candidates, securing crucial funding and organizational support.

The contrast: Derrick Van Orden's Trump-loyal voting record and juvenile antics on and off the House floor reflect poorly on his fitness to represent his purple, working-class district. While he spends his time dodging voters and posting on Twitter, his constituents — and the Cooke campaign — are focused on matters of affordability, sensible agricultural policy, and threats to their livelihood from capricious Trump tariffs.