

- NEWS

---

- 
- 
- 
- 

- HOME NEWS NEWS

---

## This time, it was personal

Tammy Baldwin easily wins bitter re-election campaign

BY VICTORIA DAVIS

NOVEMBER 7, 2018



VICTORIA DAVIS

**Baldwin to supporters: “For us, it wasn’t simply a political fight, it was a fight about doing what’s right.”**

Before this year, U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin never spoke publicly about her mother Pamela’s opioid addiction. But after her mother died last year at age 75, Baldwin opened up about her family’s struggle with substance abuse. Tuesday night at her victory party at Monona Terrace, she told supporters that her mother gave her strength during the often ugly Senate race.

“Tonight, I also give thanks to my mother,” Baldwin said after clinching victory over state Sen. Leah Vukmir. “Through her struggles, she became strong, and so did I. The strength and passion she passed on to me have been with me every step of the way.”

While Baldwin made history in 2012 as the first woman to be elected a U.S. senator in Wisconsin — and the first openly gay senator, period — her spokesperson Bill Niedhardt said this year’s election was particularly personal.

“Opioid addiction is a huge issue for voters in this state and everyone’s kind of been touched by it in some way,” said Niedhardt. “If it’s not a family member, it’s a friend, and if it’s not a friend then you know how it’s affected your community. I think when Tammy spoke from the heart, saying, ‘Hey, I’ve been there,’ I think it totally changed the tenor of this race and I think it has a lot to do with how she gained such a solid lead.”

For the crowd at Monona Terrace, the race was also personal, with longtime supporters of Baldwin in attendance as well as staff and volunteers with the Human Rights Campaign, the national LGBTQ civil rights group, who held signs reading “Women Lead.”

The unofficial results have Baldwin handily beating Vukmir (R-Brookfield) with 55 percent of the vote. Vukmir ran an especially negative campaign, linking Baldwin to terrorists and attacking her for the opioid scandal at the Tomah Veterans Affairs Medical Center. Baldwin in turn labeled Vukmir as being beholden to corporate interests.

U.S. Rep. Mark Pocan (D-Madison), who was at Baldwin's celebration (and holds her old Congressional seat), said Baldwin is extremely "connected" to the state. "Tammy has shared her own real-life story with health care and she's addressing those pocketbook issues in a way that's connecting with people. Tammy's just being herself, which is unique in the U.S. Senate. That's probably why she's done especially well."

In her speech, Baldwin acknowledged that her supporters had a lot riding on the race. "For us, it wasn't simply a political fight, it was a fight about doing what's right. In sharing the story of my own family's battle with addiction and mental illness, I wanted to give hope to other families who face the same challenges by letting them know you're not alone and we can make progress together."

The crowd responded with cheers and "Hallelujahs."

Over \$14 million was spent on attack ads against Baldwin, much of it from national special interest groups. But Baldwin won the fundraising fight, collecting \$29 million, while Vukmir netted only about \$5 million, according to the [\*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel\*](#).

"Those out-of-state billionaires who thought they could buy this race...thinking they could tell Wisconsin what to do, but all of you said, 'Not on my watch,' because they know I don't work for them, I work for you," said Baldwin, making a point to address and thank workers who need "a stronger voice," including dairy farmers and small business owners. "Across our state, Democrats, Republicans and independents sent a loud and clear message. They wanted a senator who works, not for the special interests, but someone who works for you."

Standing among the crowd of Mad Town election button-bearers was long-time Baldwin supporter Mary Strickland, a financial planner from Madison. According to Strickland, the senator has been a champion for feminists and people who identify as LGBTQ, among others.

"Politically, women carry the water for women's issues," said Strickland, who has supported Baldwin since the senator ran for the Dane County Board in the late 1980s. "It's been an exciting ride having such a strong feminist voice in the Senate, and Tammy works hard, going all through the

state talking to voters on a one-on-one level. I think people remember that.”

Baldwin began her speech on a gracious note, thanking Vukmir for her commitment to public service, and ended with a call for unity.

“In Wisconsin, we understand that America will only be made stronger when our political debate becomes more about issues, and less about knocking each other down,” Baldwin said. “I have been so inspired by your engagement in our democracy, and your grassroots activism to make a difference.... Make no mistake. I am proud to be a Wisconsin progressive.”

A woman responded: “We love you, Tammy!”

After a laugh and a grin, Baldwin responded, “Then you’ll love what I have to say next.”

“Our democracy demands more than trying simply to beat the other side,” she continued. “We are better as a country than where we find ourselves today. Let tonight be a calling for all of us. Let’s commit ourselves to something that’s larger than our own political interests and something that’s bigger than ourselves. Let us tonight start working together to advance a common good.”

[ELECTIONS](#) [TAMMY BALDWIN](#) [LEAH VUKMIR](#)

---

## RELATED



MATTHEW NORMAN

## **Evers could produce a renaissance for Wisconsin Dems**

The major implication of Tony Evers' victory over Scott Walker is that the new Democratic governor will force a fair redistricting after the 2020 Census.

NOV 7, 2018



MATTHEW NORMAN

## **Fourth time's the charm**

Democrat Tony Evers pulled off the impossible Tuesday night, toppling Gov. Scott Walker and breaking Republicans' eight-year run of dominance over Wisconsin state government. People got pretty excited.

NOV 7, 2018



## **Wisconsin Wonder**

Republicans underestimated Tammy Baldwin in 2012. This election, outside interest groups started targeting the Wisconsin senator months ago.

AUG 2, 20