

Weird stuff happened in race GOP lost in district Trump won by 20 points

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Friday, Jan. 31

Good evening! The newsletter is a little late getting out today, but at least I got one done.

By now most of you have likely heard about the special election results in Senate District 35. This is the seat that was opened up due to Gov. Kim Reynolds picking Chris Cournoyer as her Lieutenant Governor.

This also is a state senate district that President Donald J. Trump won by more than 20 points.

Despite everything that “on paper” made it look like an easy and obvious win for the Republicans, Democrats flipped the seat. So, what happened?

First, let’s make sure we understand the makeup of the Iowa Senate. With or without this seat, Republicans held a super majority in the chamber. So in terms of priorities, winning this seat probably didn’t mean much.

And once Katie Whittington won the nomination, it really probably didn't matter much. Whittington made it clear — she was pro-medical freedom, she was against eminent domain being used for carbon capture pipelines and she was a MAGA Republican. All of that adds up to not exactly being the choice of "the Party."

Now, when I say "the Party," I mean the GOP establishment. I don't mean the actual voters.

I called Katie the night she won the nomination and shared with her some of my thoughts and expressed a major concern that, I believe, actually played out in reality.

Simply said, Whittington wasn't going to Des Moines to "go along and get along." She was going to try and truly make a difference — something that would unfortunately put her at odds with "the Party."

Then things started happening. I was hearing that Republican — REPUBLICAN — elected officials in the district were advocating against — AGAINST — Whittington. I heard that a group of Young Republicans went into the district to knock for Whittington, but were given a list of either all or mostly Democrat doors by either RPI or Senate Majority Fund (or whatever the Senate version of the House Majority Fund is called). I saw with my own eyes Republican Rep. Tom Determann's wife advocating against Whittington on social media. Determann ran for the nomination but lost after an uninspiring speech at the convention.

Gov. Kim Reynolds never talked with Whittington or went into the district to do an event. Cournoyer appeared at an event, but that was about the extent of it. On election night, nobody contacted Whittington. Not Reynolds. Not Cournoyer. Not Jeff Kaufmann. Not a single Republican Iowa State Senator.

I am told that 1040 WHO Radio had Democrat Chair Rita Hart on the day of the election, but Kaufmann wasn't on the air. Go to the Iowa GOP's Twitter page and see what they posted about the special election or Katie Whittington. You won't find anything. Iowa Democrats, meanwhile, were all over it.

In addition, Whittington was planning to host a MAGA rally ahead of the election. It was going to feature a few grassroots conservative leaders and also include information about the carbon capture pipelines.

However, the local party demanded a post about the event be taken down from their page. The event never happened because of all the animosity expressed by the local party.

The chair of the Clinton County Republicans said that Steve King and Brad Sherman, who he referred to as Kim/Chris's opponent, are "terrible firebrands."

The Iowa Democrat Party sent out a blistering attack piece against Whittington leading up to the election. I am not sure if the Republican Party sent out an attack piece against Whittington's opponent, but I haven't seen it if they did. And I've seen a number of pieces sent on Whittington's behalf.

I can also confirm a weird interaction that occurred in the Iowa House on Wednesday morning. Determann was almost gloating about the Republican loss in conversation with a Democrat on the House floor, saying that Scott County would never admit they made a mistake.

Now, all of that said, and that is a lot that is said, maybe one or two of these things could sort of accidentally happen. But for them all to have happened seems to paint a pretty uncomfortable picture for Republican voters in Iowa.

Sure, Democrats tend to show up and perform better in special elections, but flipping a 20-plus-point Trump district to Democrat? Seems a bit odd.

Sometimes it seems Republicans work harder against conservatives than they do Democrats. This is why.

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