



Wisconsin Supreme Court candidate Susan Crawford speaks during her election night party after winning the election Tuesday, April 1, 2025, in Madison, Wis. (AP Photo/Kayla Wolf)



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Susan Crawford [won her bid](#) for a seat on the Wisconsin Supreme Court Tuesday. She should send Elon Musk a thank-you note. Maybe even offer to pay for his flight to the Badger State to rally for her opponent two days before the election.

Technically, Crawford defeated Brad Schimel, but Musk made the contest a referendum about himself, donating \$20 million to groups trying to beat Crawford and offering cash prizes to voters who pledged to support Schimel. Musk's appearance at the rally last Sunday led the national news.

Maybe voters did not appreciate the suggestion that their votes could be bought. Maybe they don't like Musk's haphazard dismemberment of the federal bureaucracy. Maybe they were concerned that someone who was not elected has been entrusted with such enormous power. Maybe they don't like his accent. No matter the reason, voters rejected him as surely as they elected Crawford.

The day after the Wisconsin election, Politico [reported](#) that Trump had told members of his Cabinet that Musk would be "transitioning out of the administration," and presumably leaving his role as head of the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) soon. That Cabinet meeting happened on March 24. The story leaked the day after the rebuke delivered by Wisconsin voters. That was not unintentional.

Democrats should avoid overplaying their hand. If Musk departs, many Trump voters who may be concerned about DOGE's excesses will conclude Trump shared that concern. Additionally, many Trump voters are less worried about Musk's methods than they are thrilled that we have a president who is getting something done. In "The Sounds of Music," Captain von Trapp [says](#), "Activity suggests a life filled with purpose." Trump's flurry of executive actions was intended precisely to contrast with the perception of the government as incapable of action.

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Wisconsin is a swing state. President Donald Trump [won Wisconsin](#) last November by 29,397 votes, out of almost 4.5 million votes cast. Former President Joe Biden carried the state in 2020 by 20,682 votes. In 2016, Trump beat Hillary Clinton by 22,748 votes.

The evenly divided electorate extends to down-ballot races too. Last year, Sen. Tammy Baldwin [won reelection](#) by just under 30,000 votes. In 2022, Gov. Tony Evers [won reelection](#) by a whopping margin of 90,702 votes. Nail-biting could become the state pastime.

Not this year. Crawford beat Musk, I mean Schimel, by 10 points. Democrats tend to do better in off-year, low turnout elections, but Tuesday saw more than 2.3 million voters go to the polls in Wisconsin. In 2023, 1.8 million people [voted](#) in the Supreme Court elections, which was a record at the time. Control of the court was at stake then, too. In Dane County, home to Madison, liberal bastion and Crawford's home, voter turnout was nearly 70% this year.

Wisconsin voters [also passed](#) a referendum requiring voters to present a government-issued ID by a margin of 63-37%. There is a lesson in that result that Democrats should heed: Most voters think requiring voter ID is common sense.

Democrats need to stop battling against such requirements. It is true that voter ID requirements were ostensibly devised to address a problem that does not really exist: voter fraud. But Republicans have been beating the voter fraud drum for so long and so often, enough people perceive it is a problem that the same electorate that voted for Crawford voted for the requirements.

It is also true that voter ID disproportionately affects minorities, students and urban voters, according to the [League of Women Voters](#). I wonder, however, whether all the money spent on legal fees fighting these requirements in the courts might not be better deployed finding ways to make sure those who are disproportionately affected are given the means to procure their government-issued ID. That is also preferable to challenging a policy that strikes most voters as common sense.

The GOP got some good, not great, news out of Florida. They retained [two congressional seats](#) in special elections, bolstering their narrow majority in the House of Representatives. Jimmy Patronis is on his way to Washington to represent the state's 1st district and Randy Fine will represent the 6th district. The Democrats

succeeded in cutting the GOP margin in half from last November in both districts, but no Democrat is going to be elected anytime soon in either district.

Looking ahead, everyone's eyes will be on Musk. If his role in the Trump administration is going to be marginalized, or even eliminated, how will he react? Will he go quietly, or angrily? It is hard to imagine two people with bigger egos than the president and his zillionaire sidekick. Maybe they will work it out. Maybe they won't. I will offer one prediction: If things get ugly between Trump and Musk, it will get very ugly.