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**State party chairs focus on ground game, voter outreach for 2020**

Both state Democratic party Chair Ben Wikler and state Republican Chair Andrew Hitt stressed a commitment to expanding their party’s ground game and voter outreach programs ahead of the 2020 presidential election.

Speaking Sept. 12 at a WisPolitics.com luncheon in Madison, Hitt highlighted a pivot in strategy toward an initiative to reach voters in person that he said paid dividends in the 2019 state Supreme Court race win by conservative Brian Hagedorn.

“In 2018, there was a heavy focus on digital; there was a heavy focus on on-air advertising,” he said. “We really wanted to balance that out and focused on the grassroots army of volunteers, make sure they had the tools they needed, the resources they needed.”

The state GOP chair added that after Hagedorn’s come-from-behind win in the state Supreme Court election in April — after the conservative was outraised and outspent by his liberal opponent — “we’re sort of doubling down on that.”

While Hitt acknowledged Republicans struggled to compete in suburbs across the country in 2018, he said that trend began to “wash away” in Wisconsin in 2019 with a renewed focus on grassroots organizing. He predicted that would continue into 2020.

But the GOP isn’t the only party expanding its ground operations.

“I think Ben has got kind of the same approach,” Hitt said of his Democratic counterpart. “Sort of funny, as I listened to some of the interviews and some of the things he’s saying, our strategies are not all that different.”

Wikler highlighted Hillary Clinton’s loss in the 2016 presidential election as a pivotal moment for his party, after which it reevaluated its strategies to reach and turn out voters.

“We looked at what happened, and we looked at what had worked in previous elections and came across the neighborhood team model,” he said, adding that model was “pioneered” by the Obama campaign.

“It involves working in communities rather than having paid staff knocking on doors,” he said.

Getting involved in communities early in the spring of 2017, Wikler said, has allowed the party to work in parts of the state that “hadn’t heard from Democrats in a long time.” Wikler said this would be key to winning back support in Republican strongholds in the suburban Milwaukee counties and rural northern Wisconsin.

This was crucial, Wikler said, because the prevalence of conservative talk radio and Fox News often means voters in GOP-controlled districts “hear what Democrats are talking about primarily from Republican media.”

“The key thing for Democrats to counter that is to speak for themselves, to actually show up in communities and explain what they stand for,” he said.

The state Democratic chair said he believes this approach will successfully negate President Trump’s attempts to portray U.S. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., and the so-called “Squad” of three other liberal congresswomen as the face of the party.

“Our job is to organize folks on the ground and make sure that when people think about Democrats, they’ll think about the presidential nominee,” he said. “They’ll think about the person who knocked on their door the day before, the conversations in their communities.

“Those are the literal faces of the Democratic Party.”

Much like his counterpart, Hitt said he believes an expanded ground game will help the GOP reach voters who have not traditionally supported the Republican Party and highlighted meeting voters of color as “a huge priority for me.”

“I don’t think that the Republican Party has done a good job of reaching out to the black community, to the Hispanic community, to other minority communities,” he said.

Hitt said he believes the Republican message on “issues around the kitchen table” such as economic opportunities, a chance for economic prosperity and school choice will resonate with minority voters.

“But if we don’t go and talk to them, we have no chance,” he said.

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