11/25/2024 / The Democrat who won in Trump country

**[HALF SECOND OF SILENCE]**

**[BILLBOARD]**

SCORING IN <The sky darkens, BMC>

NOEL KING (HOST) : The rap on the Democrats IN 2024 was that they only spoke to the very rich and the very poor. So they lost the working class. But / not ALL of them lost. Marie Gluesenkamp Perez-didn’t just win, she won in Trump country.

*<TAPE> MARIE GLUESENKAMP PEREZ (US CONGRESS) : You know, Democrats work in the trades, like we live in rural communities. We are not the devil. We are your neighbors though,. Before being elected, I ran an auto repair and machine shop with my husband. And we live in unincorporated Skamania County and our son is three years old now.*

NOEL: Skamania County in Washington State has a National Forest and a population of about 12,000 people

*MARIE: We get our Internet from a radio tower. We get our water from a well.*

NOEL: In her first term, Gluesenkamp-Perez crossed the aisle to vote with Republicans, ON BEHALF OF her rural and working-class constituents and she horrified some Democrats along the way. Her plans to get things done despite a Republican MAJORITY in Congress. Coming up, on Today, Explained.

**[THEME]**

NOEL KING (HOST) : Last week, I went to Capitol Hill to talk to Representative Marie Gluesenkamp Perez who represents Washington’s third. It’s a swing district. It was held by a Republican for 12 years before SHE won in 2022. This time around, Donald Trump backed her opponent Joe Kent. So, I asked her … why do YOU think you won?

MARIE GLUESENKAMP PEREZ (US CONGRESS): Well, I think, what we want in southwest Washington is to see our priorities and our culture reflected in Washington, D.C. We don't want a national agenda or a culture from somewhere else, imported and replacing our our community, our values, our priorities. And so just a real focus on on what my community needs, what our values are, who we are. You know, that district went for Trump by 7 points in 16. And this time we were able to point to my record and say, like, I'm not here to play partisan football. I'm here because I see and value what we have. And I know it's worth fighting for. Like, you know, on the student student loan forgiveness, I looked at the data. My district only holds 3% of the federally issued debt. This was a regressive tax policy. If you support progressive tax strategies, you should do that consistently, not just when there's, you know, party favors. And, you know, I had people protests our auto shop.

NOEL: Just to clarify, for listeners who may not know, you voted against President Biden’s student debt relief, people looked at you and said, ‘a Democrat!’

MARIE: Oh Yeah. So they they you know, we're really aggressive on our on our online reviews. We had we. Take real pride in the quality of work you do and had that take, you know, people were just bombing it who’d never been customers. But hearing from my community, like, yeah, like we don't want the trades to be considered as an afterthought. We don't want to be second fiddle and, and really challenging the idea that, like, academic intelligence is the thing that we should be supporting. We want good jobs that don't require a college degree. We want honors level shop class in junior high. You know, those are the things that reflect our values and our priorities. And so that's how I vote.

NOEL: The thing about national office and I think this is where the pushback comes in, is when you vote, when you're in national office and you vote, you vote on something that affects everybody in the country. So not many people in your district ended up in a lot of college debt. But all across the United States, many, many, many young people did. You're in national office, you don't just vote for this little corner of Washington, because your vote as one of 435, it affects the whole country. How do you respond to that?

MARIE: Well, my job is to represent my community. You know, the people that live where I live. And that's my role. And I think the way that you arrive at good policy is by having everyone show up at the table with the unique perspectives of their community and loyalty there. And that is how you end up with better policy in the end. Like you don't get good legislation without having people who are driving trucks and changing diapers and turning wrenches at the table, not as an afterthought, but in the inception of the legislation.

NOEL: Whether you support Donald Trump or are a critic of his, one thing that you can say he successfully did is he turned local issues national right? Springfield, Ohio, was struggling with an influx of immigrants. There is no reason that somebody in Maine or Florida or Texas should have cared at all about Springfield, Ohio. That was a local issue. Donald Trump took that local issue, made it a national issue. Some analysts say that is what helped him win.

MARIE: I think. Let me think about that. People want to be heard. I had a lot of people, colleagues, whatever, saying like, how do we get people to understand that the economy's actually great? Like: what do we need to say?

NOEL: This was a democratic line.

MARIE: You don't. You don't. Don't do that. People are putting their groceries on a credit card. You know, it's like you go to Albertsons or whatever, your grocery store and you feel like you're in a game of chicken with the CEO. And so don't gaslight people. Hear them, nobody cares about your spreadsheets. You know? And I think that is the loyalty that needs to guide any progress. Getting back to a place where we are finding the non political ways of conveying our values, you know, like I think, you know, people that can like get their Honda Civic to 500,000 miles that's cool and when those people are regarded as, you know, like the vanguard of environmentalism, I think that's that that that's progress like that is how you grow the field of of people who feel, real like, that is how you build a coalition that can actually pass useful legislation.

NOEL: The person who gets their Honda Civic to 500,000 miles, as you said, is not usually identified as like, wow, that person's a great environmentalist. It's like, that person is broke. Right. And that's why they've run their car to half a million miles. Good for them. But do you think there's a kind of snobbery within the Democratic Party where maybe the heroes that the party's choosing are the wrong heroes?

MARIE: Well, what I've seen being here is that I mean, it feels like everybody is under 40 and has like at least two degrees. And, you know, that's not what the country looks like. That's not what the value system of merit is everywhere.

NOEL: Do you mean over 40 and has two degrees.

MARIE: Under 40 under.

NOEL: Okay. You feel like you feel like Washington, Congress is young.

MARIE: I mean, like all of the, like, staff and lobbyists and, you know, like, you're.

NOEL: aaah ok…

MARIE: The people who are, you know often writing legislation.

NOEL: Gotcha. Okay keep going. Sorry.

MARIE: I was talking to a constituent. She. She works in childcare. She told me she is not legally allowed to peel a banana or like an orange that is considered food prep. They are not a licensed food prep facility. So they can open a bag of chips, can't peel a banana. And I went round and round and round for like four months and I had my office like talking to local regulators and licensors and elected officials. And they kept saying that she's dumb, she doesn't understand the rules.

NOEL: Does she understand the rules?

MARIE: Yes. Yes,

NOEL: ok, ok!

MARIE: Their licensors said they would need six more sinks before they were legally allowed to be engaged in food prep. And I don't think this is a small thing. Like I have a toddler. I know how durable food preferences are.

NOEL: So are toddlers.

MARIE: Yeah.

NOEL: Sorry.

MARIE: And and like, having regard and respect and and agency and having people who are actually doing the work at the core of the legislative process. Like so I introduced a bill that creates a positive right to serve fresh fruits and vegetables. Says If your state is taking federal dollars for child care, you will not infringe on the right to serve fresh fruits and vegetables. And this is the long work of building strong local agriculture and national health.

NOEL: It is also, if we're being honest, in a tradition that more closely hews to what Republicans think. You're pointing to overregulation and you're saying this is ridiculous. And I can imagine Democrats saying, but what about listeria? Every time you turn on the news these days, there is listeria in something, there's E.coli in something, you're going to give it to the kids. How do you square the party that you're in and the historical positions that it's taken on, things like regulation?

MARIE: I don't know if it's like necessarily partisan as much as like parents know, that food preferences and children are very durable, you know, And so my experience as a young mom is what's driving that, not like a partisan agenda. But I think that this. Is absolutely one of the reasons that there's one licensed daycare facility in my entire county. Think about it like the overhead of like, installing six different works. You know, so what are the ways that we can find structural reforms to build health, to build access, to provide quality care?

NOEL: I think there's a conception that being the minority party in the House, the Senate, and not holding the presidency means you cannot get anything done. You're going to be up against this. Does your mind go when you think about …certainly you don't seem like somebody who wants to spend two years just spinning your wheels. What's the plan?

MARIE: No, I mean, I. Right. Like, I miss my family. You know, I. I'd better be productive if I'm not going to be with them. And I'm on a plane, like every three days. I'm not doing that. To just sit here and reflexively disagree. It's as much as possible getting ahead of, you know, when a bill is dropped and figuring out like, what are the parts here that my community agrees with? How could I make this more reflective of our values? You know, the fuller picture of a situation like frequently just being from a rural community means that, you know, that has not been considered by whatever committee staff drafted the bill. So getting our perspective, our values, our priorities baked in and then working on amendments afterwards. But, you know, I mean, elections have consequences. So, you know, I think it's important to hear what people are saying and and with curiosity and and figure out what are the what are the shared parts we agree on. You know, I don't know what bills will come to the floor, but I you know, I mean, I just continue to be myself and reflect my community and and just work hard to knit our community back together.

SCORING IN <Fish in a Cup, BMC>

NOEL: Representative Marie Gluesenkamp Perez, Washington state's third District, Thank you so much for taking the time. We appreciate it.

MARIE: Thank you so much.

NOEL: Coming up…so you’re in the minority in Congress…. how to get things done anyway.

**[BREAK]**

**[BUMPER]**

NOEL: I’m Noel King with Sarah Binder. She teaches political science at GWU and is a fellow at Brookings. Alright Sarah, for the next two years Democrats will be in the minority in the house and Senate. They will TRY to get things done. Are there moments in the past where you can look back and say dang, the minority really pulled that off?

**SARAH:** George W Bush in 2005, beginning of his second term. He and his administration is proposing to privatize Social Security.

SCORING IN – (dorian) And The Moustache Was His Name-02

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hd9fUy_trAE)*> Bush: to give younger workers the option of putting a portion of their payroll taxes into a voluntary personal retirement account.*

SARAH: You are responsible for the investments of your Social security. You take on the risk. And Democrats so it was a Republican majority. Democrats in the minority in the Senate. They basically threatened to filibuster. They said, if you do this, we're going to go ballistic.

*<CLIP> PELOSI: Today, as we are here on the floor of the house, House Democrats are offering a motion that will give members of Congress a chance to say exactly where they stand on the President’s proposal on privitization….. KEEP RUNNING UNDER*

SARAH: We're going to get the senior citizens on our side. We're going to defeat you not by voting things down, but by raising the stakes. Right. Getting the public getting their attention, getting them off the sidelines so that they are going to come to fight it as well.

*<CLIP> PELOSI: Over 300 town hall meetings have taken place or shortly will be. We’re now going on to the next phase of them….*

SARAH: Affordable Care Act under Trump in 2018 at that election. Right. The minority party Democrats in in the House didn't really have a lot of power, but they could attract attention. They could say Trump wants to take away your health insurance for your children under 26. Trump wants to make take away the protection for preexisting health conditions.

<CLIP> JACKY ROSEN: *“We all have reasons to fix our healthcare system but Republicans in Congress keep voting to repeal Obamacare instead of fixing it…*

*<CLIP> WaPo: MANCHIN: To take away healthcare from people with pre-existing conditions. He is just dead wrong. And that aint gonna happen GUNSHOT*

<CLIP> BOB CASEY AD *“If seniors had to pay another 6400 a year for healthcare, how would they manage? Eat less? [fade down]*

Raise the stakes. Get attention, right? The minority can do that. And that's often their key to power. Right. Force the majority to make concessions or even sometimes to back down.

SCORING OUT

Today's Senate, you need 60 votes to cut off debate. Most majorities don't have 60 votes. Right. The new incoming one is probably at 53. So if they can't get Democrats to vote with them to cut off debate, the Senate goes nowhere.

**NOEL:** In politics in 2024, a lot of the analysis that we're seeing about the Democrats losing the presidency, the House and the Senate. Suggests that Republicans are going to go ham and roll over their colleagues, get done what they want to get done. It's almost some of the analysis almost suggests that it's like kind of punitive. You guys lost. And so we are going to trample right over you. Was it always this way?

**SARAH:** Well, over congressional history, we've in American history, we've had periods of very high partisanship and very low partisanship. Sometimes it just means like the conservatives are on one side of the aisle and and liberals are on the other side of the party aisle and they have core disagreements about the role of government. But today's partisanship, it's really almost it's just it's team play, right? Your team is against it, so my team's going to be for this bill, right? You can switch positions. Your party used to be against it. Now you're for it. And so we're going to be against it. Like reflexive partisanship. You're for it. I'm against it. That, seems a bit newer than we've seen before.

**NOEL:** Okay. So in the first half of the show, we talked to a young congresswoman who kind of made her name by crossing over the aisle. She's a Democrat and voting with Republicans. And the think pieces that have been written about her suggests that, my God, she's a traitor. How could she do this? I think what I hear you saying is, once upon a time, it wasn't that way. It hasn't always been that way.

**SARAH:** We have periods of time where within the Democratic Party there were conservatives and there were liberals. We've had periods of time in the past where we had the Republican Party, conservatives and liberals. Right. We don't even we don't even have the term anymore ‘liberal Republicans.’ But we had them. We would usually put this period roughly mid-late 1940s and then petering out by the 1980s into the early 1990s. Who are the liberal Republicans? Senator Jacob Javits from New York.

*<CLIP> JAVITS: In our country. We don't tolerate police by terror taking the law into their own hands…*

He was a Republican. Right. Senator Durenberger, a liberal Republican from the state of Minnesota.

*<CLIP> Durenberger: Four years ago you elected me to represent you in the United State Senate. I promised to stay in touch with you, that I’d represent your views and above all that I’d be myself…*

*<CLIP> CBS: in his later years. Durenberger criticized what he called his Republican party's hard swing to the right and he endorsed Hillary Clinton and Joe Biden for president.*

And on the same token, we've had conservative Democrats. Right. Even in the 1940s and 50s, we would say segregationist Democrats. Conservatives in the Democratic Party.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7bhanELn90I)*> GOV. THURMAN: These damnable proposals he has recommended under the guise of so called Civil Rights. And I tell you the American people from one side to the other had better wake up and oppose such a program.*

SARAH: Today's parties just don't look like that. But we do see these bipartisan pairs. I think it's important to like get below the the surface of where most of the spotlight is. You do see not on big, major bills right? A bipartisan pair is not going to reform and fix Social Security right? But a bipartisan pair might deal with a special problem in an agricultural office. Loans are going through. Subsidies aren't working. So there is room for bipartisanship. But oftentimes there are a lot of incentives not to work with the other team.

**NOEL:** We’ve talked about how people at times have crossed party lines, teamed up on things. There does seem to be another way that the minority party can get things done, and that is to not get things done, to hold things up to whatever extent they can. And I think in 2024, a lot of people are wondering, will they try it this time? Can you tell us what it looks like when that happens?

SCORING IN – Bees Ambient 3 Marble Structures (slow minimal ambient twinkly scattered bed)-01

**SARAH:** Sure. So the probably the most famous or infamous of these efforts by minorities and at times minority parties, but minority groups to block majorities, especially in the Senate, was the efforts by Southerners to block action on protecting civil rights, right? anti-lynching laws, anti poll tax laws. The minority party or at that time really a minority coalition filibustering in the Senate to block forward action on major civil rights measures.

*<CLIP> THURMOND: We are going to give this fight against bureaucratic tyranny and totalitarianism, everything we have.*

**SARAH:** In a period of unified party control. Minority parties have been better suited toward blocking things or maybe sometimes we might say moderating majority agendas. The most recent clear version of that was Trump in 2017, Republican House Republicans. Senate Republicans in the House had voted 60 times in the past decade to repeal the Affordable Care Act. It was top, top priority…

SCORING OUT

And on, technically, it was blocked because Senator John McCain, a Republican, broke from his party.

*<CLIP> CNN ANCHOR: … prompting an audible gasp in the chamber*

*McCain: no. GASPS APPLAUSE*

But keep in mind, what did the Democrats do? They made sure the public was very aware that it was the Trump administration and Trump trying to take away their health care rights.

*<CLIP> TRUMP: Nobody knew healthcare could be so complicated*

SARAH: So that's how minority parties can try to make a difference here by blocking things is just elevating and getting the audience right out of the bleachers and onto the field to try to block the majority. However, there were a number of big issues tackled that Democrats were part of renegotiating and redoing NAFTA, the trade agreement with Mexico and Canada. House Democrats, led by Speaker Pelosi in 2019, played a big role. Opioids addiction, that was bipartisan, sanctions on Russia that was bipartisan. So Democrats did not sit out the first Trump administration. They found some common ground, particularly with the Senate, not necessarily initially with President Trump, but tried to use it to move those priorities closer to their own.

SCORING IN – FISH IN A CUP

The challenge here for the Democrats this go round and for future minority parties is it's hard to break break through the public's attention, I think in part because many partisans are in their own news bubbles. Right. And so let's say the Trump administration administration decides it wants to cut spending on health care for the poor. Is that going to be shown on Fox News? I don't know. Right. And so the Democrats have to figure out who they want to get off the sidelines. So it's a challenge, I think, to find ways to reach different generations and how to break through these media silos that often people are are stuck in.

MUSIC BUMP

This is how I think about it. Unified party control of government does not last very long. On average, unified party control. Basically last two years, two to three years. Majorities like to overreach. And voters often make them pay the price.

NOEL: Sarah Binder, George Washington University and Brookings. Today’s team: Victoria Chamberlin, Peter Balonon-Rosen, Amina al-Sadi, Patrick Boyd, Andrea Kristinsdottir and me, Noel King.

**[10 SECONDS OF SILENCE]**