

# [***In swing-state Wisconsin, Democrat hustles to keep key Senate seat against Trump-backed millionaire***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BPV-F4C1-DYMD-60GB-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

NEW GLARUS, Wis. — Democratic Sen. [*Tammy Baldwin*](https://apnews.com/hub/tammy-baldwin), whose “go everywhere” 2018 campaign strategy became a model for how to win in battleground Wisconsin, knows her road to victory this year against a [*multimillionaire Republican*](https://apnews.com/article/wisconsin-senate-baldwin-hovde-a531c691d55f290c300124c1f273268a) supporter of former President Donald Trump goes through places like New Glarus.

The bucolic village of 2,200, founded by Swiss immigrants and famous for its Spotted Cow craft beer, is a world away from the urban Democratic strongholds of Milwaukee and Madison, where Democrats like Baldwin and President Joe Biden rack up massive margins of victory.

“Look, in a state like Wisconsin, a 50-50 battleground state, you don’t have to win every county,” Baldwin said in a warehouse surrounded by pallets of New Glarus beer, sold only in Wisconsin. “But it is really critical that you get folks out to vote, and you have the discussions and up the turnout in every community that you can.”

The likely contest between Baldwin and Republican Eric Hovde shapes up as one of the most competitive and expensive Senate races in the country. A Baldwin victory is [*crucial for Democrats*](https://apnews.com/article/2022-midterm-elections-pennsylvania-arizona-nevada-new-york-6a8b17c560e545e4124e61fa14b3f4ad) who are [*defending 23 seats*](https://apnews.com/article/2022-midterm-elections-pennsylvania-arizona-nevada-new-york-6a8b17c560e545e4124e61fa14b3f4ad) in the Senate, including three held by independents who caucus with Democrats clinging to a 51-49 majority. That’s compared with just 11 seats that Republicans hope to keep in their column.

Baldwin emphasizes her deep ties to Wisconsin, forged over nearly 40 years in elected office, and her ability to fight for issues that resonate deeply in the state, like supporting the dairy industry, investing in infrastructure and [*keeping jobs in America*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QqNCQqmjMZI).

Hovde, who faces nominal opposition in the Republican primary Aug. 13, argues that Baldwin is nothing more than a career politician who has not done enough to address concerns of voters this cycle like immigration, the economy and foreign affairs. He calls her "nothing but a rubber stamp for the progressive left.”

He is also trying to walk a tightrope with Trump in a state the former president won in 2016 but lost to Biden in 2020. Both elections were decided by fewer than 23,000 votes.

In [*Tuesday's presidential primary*](https://apnews.com/article/primaries-wisconsin-connecticut-new-york-rhode-island-70c6d0bfb946af5ff4c2d5c435625f91), roughly 18,500 more Republicans cast ballots than Democrats, a potential sign of higher GOP enthusiasm.

Hovde picked up an endorsement from Trump at a Tuesday night rally in Green Bay, and then touted it on Wednesday in a fundraising plea. But he has set distance between them in some ways.

Trump has falsely claimed for years, including at his Wisconsin rally, that he won the state in 2020 but the election was stolen for Biden. Hovde told The Associated Press that he disagreed.

“Do I think it was stolen? No," Hovde said. “Do I think there were troubling and challenging things? Yeah. So let’s clean them up.”

Hovde said that while he agrees with Trump on “most of his policies,” he will not “engage in the ***politics*** of personal destruction.”

“I’m committed to trying to bring our country together,” Hovde said, striking a different tone from Trump who has referred to Biden as a “lunatic" and labeled the president's supporters as “thugs" at the Green Bay rally.

“We have become way too divisive as a country," Hovde told AP. "We need to heal. I’m willing to cooperate, reach across the aisle.”

Hovde's message is shaped to appeal to the small, but crucial, bloc of independent voters in Wisconsin who typically decide close elections.

In his 2020 defeat, Trump lost support in the Milwaukee suburbs and other conservative strongholds, like the Fox Valley and Green Bay. Democrats have [*built their run*](https://apnews.com/article/wisconsin-republican-democrats-2024-conventions-0f491544fe1abf2a6addb97cfd5482bf) of 14 victories in the past 17 statewide elections by eating into those Republican areas while driving up turnout in Madison and Milwaukee.

Hovde knows he must improve on Trump's margins in the suburbs, while also dampening the Democratic advantage in urban areas. He's already advertising on television in Madison and Milwaukee, the state's two largest cities.

“I think it’s a mistake when Republican candidates don’t compete in Milwaukee and Madison,” Hovde said. “So I’m spending a lot of time on both these markets and will compete hard.”

In 2018, Baldwin cruised to an 11-point victory, a whopping margin in a state where four of the past six presidential races have been decided by less than a point. In that same 2018 election, Democrat Tony Evers defeated then-Gov. Scott Walker by just over 1 point.

Baldwin's strategy that year, seen as a model for Democrats ever since, was to compete everywhere, including rural areas.

Baldwin said during a tour of New Glarus Brewing Company that it is “critical” for her to show up all over the state. In 2020, Biden carried Green County, where New Glarus is located, by just 662 votes.

She hit numerous smaller towns and cities during her 19-county, 1,400-mile “Dairyland” launch tour, taking a boat ride in the tourism hub of Wisconsin Dells and meeting with tribal leaders in Ashland.

Baldwin's attack on Hovde, who is [*CEO of H Bancorp*](https://www.sunwestbank.com/about/leadership/) and its primary subsidiary, Utah-based Sunwest Bank, is that he's trying to buy the Senate seat.

Hovde has largely cleared the GOP primary field with his deep pockets.

Another wealthy businessman, Scott Mayer, opted in March against a run. Former Milwaukee County [*Sheriff David Clarke*](https://apnews.com/article/elections-wisconsin-presidential-elections-election-2020-subpoenas-b2883b80e7c322e1794835cf3537b9fa), a staunch Trump supporter who brands himself as “America’s Sheriff” on the conservative speaking circuit, has toyed with a run but not committed.

Last week Clarke teased a “big announcement,” but it turned out to be a book giveaway.

Hovde was born and raised in Wisconsin but also owns a $7 million estate in Laguna Beach, California. He has tried to laugh off the accusation that he’s more California than Wisconsin, [*posting a video*](https://apnews.com/article/wisconsin-senate-cold-plunge-hovde-baldwin-2ca7385ca88da4f0d2851fe897828aed) of himself shirtless, submerged in a frigid Madison lake in February, challenging Baldwin to prove her Wisconsin bona fides and do the same. She declined.

Hovde also said he got donations from more than 2,000 Wisconsin residents in the first month after his campaign launch.

In addition to painting Hovde as an out-of-touch outsider, Baldwin once again hopes abortion fuels Democratic turnout as it did in last year's Wisconsin Supreme Court race, won by the liberal candidate, and the 2022 midterm.

Vice President Kamala Harris came to the conservative Milwaukee suburb of Waukesha in January [*to talk about abortion rights*](https://apnews.com/article/kamala-harris-abortion-biden-2024-election-560bc2bbdf036c18b6601ced44a62b50), one in a series of stops she and Biden have made in Wisconsin. The president was due back in Madison on Monday for his 10th trip to Wisconsin as president.

Hovde said he supported the Supreme Court's overturning of Roe v. Wade in 2022, but in another break with Trump, told AP that he would not vote for a federal law banning abortion, saying states should decide. [*Trump has suggested he would support a federal ban.*](https://apnews.com/article/trump-abortion-ban-15-weeks-91a9e0ce87d11dff0fa761f327bd0566) He also said that “there’s a reasonable time in a woman’s pregnancy to make a choice,” but did not specify how late into a pregnancy that should be.

That is a change of his position from 2012, when he last ran for Senate as someone “totally opposed” to abortion.

Hovde will have to win on the issues to have a chance, said longtime Republican strategist Bill McCoshen.

“Her constituent services is what makes her so strong,” McCoshen said. “She and her staff deliver. And she’ll have unconventional endorsements that would normally go to a Republican candidate."

Baldwin's constituent work was on display at New Glarus Brewing, where co-owner Deb Carey praised Baldwin for fighting to lower the beer tax, in addition to supporting affordable health care and protecting Social Security.

“Tammy is a practical person that is from Wisconsin and she works hard for Wisconsin and has for many years,” Carey said. “She absolutely deserves to be reelected."

Hovde should look to Baldwin's first Senate victory in 2012 over Tommy Thompson, the popular former four-term governor, for how to run this year's race, McCoshen said.

“Hovde’s got to give her voters permission to vote against her this time,” McCoshen said.

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This story has been corrected to reflect that Sunwest Bank is based in Utah, not California.

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