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Introduction

In one of the most anticipated gubernatorial elections in the 2022 midterms, all eyes were on the state of Wisconsin. Incumbent Tony Evers faced challenger Tim Michels, a vice president of his family's construction company based in Milwaukee. After Evers won with a bigger margin than anticipated, this race and his victory symbolizes a much more important phenomenon spreading across the country. Anticipating a Republican “red wave”, MAGA sympathizers and Donald Trump supporters were seen as front runners for a multitude of campaigns all around America. The acceptance speech, while full of Wisconsinite vernacular, serves as a strong example of how politicians are working towards uniting drastically polarized constituents. Across the political communication sphere, all successful victory or concession speeches achieve the same six benchmarks. In no particular order, the speeches often include a formal declaration of victory or defeat, a call for unity, a tribute to American democracy, affirming the candidate's campaign, a transformed role for the candidates, and thanking supporters. Taking a look at Governor Evers's acceptance speech on the night of November 8th, he makes a point to hit every expected benchmark or target talking point. In doing so, he enables his leadership to continue moving forward on a positive note while also providing Wisconsin with hope for what is to come in the next four years.

Lens Description

Within all victory and concession speeches made in recent American history, Ritter and Howell claim that all have six common themes amongst them. Clearly admitting victory or defeat is an important message to convey when an election race is over. Constituents need to have a clear understanding of the outcome of the race, and it builds trust when that information comes directly from a candidate rather than from an outside source. Next, in order to heal wounds created by the campaigns, it is important to have a sense of unification amongst voters. While the election might have caused some hard feelings, it is important to recognize that the race is over and the community must work together again. On top of that, candidates should not only thank their supporters and competitors but also make a note to mention the strength of democracy and how their role as a candidate will shift post-election (RITTER & HOWELL, 2001). In an attempt to continue to rally supporters, most victory speeches are intended to provide hope and faith for the group's future. In the grand scheme of things, victory and concession speeches are seemingly inconsequential. The race is over, and more support truly isn't needed in favor of the winning candidate. However, they play an essential role in America's democracy. Both victory and concession speeches allow for the natural transfer of power to take place, and that transfer is expected to be done so seamlessly and voluntarily.

Speech acts are heavily represented in victory speeches, particularly those that are assertive and declarative. In the terms of Ritter and Howell, gratitude and plans for the future are commonly found in political victory speeches. Connecting with the audience, which in this case encompasses both those who voted for or against the victor, is a key factor in continuing to build trust and a strong relationship with citizens (Sofian, E.S. 2021). However, while it is common for political victory and concession speeches to include certain attributes, it is not a requirement to

structure a speech in that way. There are always outliers or individuals who break the traditional mold as situational context and personal styles play a role in how a speech is crafted and delivered. In both the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections, the presidential and vice presidential candidates across the board strayed from this cookie-cutter-like perspective of how a victory or loss should be communicated to the public. Additionally, presidential and vice presidential candidates need to be in agreement with what type of message is going to be sent following either a loss or a victory (Willyard & Ritter, 2005). Both studies regarding the 2000 and 2004 elections refer to Ruth Ann Weaver's 1982 study, and even then she made the statement that variations of the expected traits were quite prevalent in the mid-late 1900s (Weaver, R.A. 1982). Remaining fluid and open with one's constituents allows for a more natural delivery and honest assessment of the race, but at the end of the day, it is important for candidates to reaffirm the democratic processes that occur within The United States.

Analysis

Early on November 9th, 2022, Wisconsin's incumbent governor Tony Evers and his supporters celebrated his second victory. Starting off his speech in true midwestern fashion, he made it a point to thank everyone there with him. After a blanket thank you, he went on to explain that his challenger, Tim Michels, had recently called him to concede the race. To fully secure the first appearance of Ritter and Howell's victory speech characteristics, Evers stated that he was "excited to be here tonight to say that I'm Tony Evers and I'm incredibly proud to be the 46th governor of the state of Wisconsin. And I'm jazzed as hell to tell you that on Jan 3, 2023, I will still be the 46th governor of the great state of Wisconsin!" (*Tony Evers Victory Speech*, 2022). While Evers never explicitly said that he won, his phrasing and mention that Michels has

conceded to the race imply his victory. Now that a clear winner and loser is established, Evers has an easier time moving on with the rest of his speech. From here, he is able to go into detail about the campaign in general and his future goals.

Tony Evers thoroughly thanks a lot of people throughout his victory speech, and it is the thing that he mentions the most. Right off the bat, the second he is done confirming the results of the race, he goes on to thank his many supporters. From the people who “volunteered and made phone calls, knocked doors, and brought their friends, family, and loved ones to the polls,” to those who welcomed him into their communities, Evers expresses immense gratitude. With this portion of his speech, his phrasing is very nuanced to encompass a large audience. While he isn’t talking to his direct constituent base just yet, he makes a valiant effort to include all groups of people and supporters. He recognizes that a lot of hard work went into this campaign, and there were a lot of moving parts that worked together in order to make his victory possible. About halfway through his speech, he makes a note to personally thank his family. He includes his children and grandchildren and gives a special shout-out to his wife. This is a great way for Evers to humanize himself to those who may not support him. By relying on his character and including personal aspects of his family life, he is giving the audience a little glimpse into his everyday life. This enables individuals to not only connect with him on a deeper level but to hopefully see him in a more positive light.

Along with thanking all of his supporters, Governor Evers makes it a point to thank challenger Tim Michels as well. As a way to affirm Michels’s campaign, Evers “thanks him and his family for a hard-fought campaign.” While the sentiment is brief, he still recognizes that the other candidate served a role in this race. Basking in his victory, Evers also affirms his campaign strategy and the team of individuals who helped him get to this point. On top of that, he notes

how this campaign and this victory are bigger than himself. To affirm his campaign, he tells the crowd that they “showed up.” He goes on to list a handful of policy areas that he has already worked on during his first term, and he alludes to the fact that he will continue to work hard for Wisconsin farms, small businesses, the education system, roads, and much more.

On top of praising Wisconsinites for standing up to support positive change concerning the major issues citizens face, Evers makes a tribute to American democracy. According to the governor, voters “showed up because [they] saw our democracy was on the brink of existence and [they] decided to do a damn thing about it.” Similar to how he addressed the opposition's campaign, this sentiment is more implied than explicitly stated. Admitting the fact that our democracy was in peril alludes to the idea that based on these election results, order has somewhat been restored to the balance of powers. In spite of the growing fears regarding the integrity of American democracy, Evers drives home the idea that unity is essential for Wisconsin moving forward.

With the governor's race being won by a Democrat and the state senate race being won by a Republican, Wisconsin is in a deeply divided and polarized position. However, by continuing to use examples of how he will propel the state of Wisconsin forward in his second term, Evers tells constituents that “there is still so much that unites us rather than divides us” ... “Tonight we prove there is so much we can do when we work together. When we do the right thing. When we’re willing to fight for the future that we want for our kids and our state and we’re just getting started, folks.” As an elected official, he understands the position he is in terms of public opinion. Calling for unity amongst common fears and concerns along with providing hope for a prosperous future only adds to the numerous ways in which he builds trust and confidence through this speech.

Another way that Evers works to build unity amongst his audience is by continuously reminding everyone that he is a Wisconsinite serving Wisconsin. Midwestern language creeps into his speech, including phrases such as “holy mackerel,” “jazzed as hell,” “polka tonight,” and many utterances of “folks.” Language in and of itself is a powerful tool to unify individuals, especially when speakers use regionally specific vernacular. Here, Evers effectively uses unique phrasing and vocabulary to remind listeners that at the end of the day, Wisconsinites will always be Wisconsinites.

Discussion

In this victory speech, Governor Evers has a talking point that aligns with all other victory and concession speeches across the modern political speech. While some mentions are vague, others carry a large presence. In terms of effectiveness, Evers did what he set out to do. Since he is an incumbent candidate, a lot of the decisions he will make moving forward in his second term are going to be extensions of what he has been doing for the last four years. The largest portion of this victory speech has to do with thanking the crowd and his numerous supporters. Allowing those who did not support him to see the powerful force of different industries and sectors coming together to support Evers builds faith in the fact that he will continue to have the people's best interests in mind moving forward.

In terms of ethics, Governor Evers is far from being unethical. In fact, he hardly mentions his competitor in his speech. While Tim Michels is referenced in the beginning to solidify the idea that he had conceded and Evers was the true victor, Governor Evers did not attack either Michels's character or campaign. Some may argue that making more references to the competitor in a respectable manner encourages unity, yet it is not always necessary. Sometimes it is better to

cordially acknowledge the other candidate and move forward without dwelling too much on the campaign itself. Evers did a good job of mapping out the future he wants to see for Wisconsin through the people who voted for him.

There were ways for this speech to deliver a stronger message in terms of paying tribute to America's democracy. This midterm election in particular was one where a lot of individuals were turning towards Wisconsin to see if the state would continue to support a democrat incumbent or turn towards a Trump-backed business-type Republican. The symbolism of Evers winning the election was reflected across the nation as similar races experienced similar outcomes. While Evers did a good job of calling for unity and thanking those who have continuously supported him, there was more room in this speech to stress the importance of voting and a peaceful transfer of power.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the surface-level effects of political victory and concession speeches are seemingly inconsequential. With the race already over and done with, a candidate doesn't necessarily have to do anything to garner more support. However, symbolically these speeches serve to bridge a link between competitors and administrations. As a way to show the smooth transfer of power that occurs within the United States government, addressing the public after a loss or a victory is a way to show respect for democracy and the people the politicians are to serve. After Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers won reelection in November 2022, his victory speech was sufficient in terms of the criteria analyzed and described by Ritter and Howell. Relying mainly on showing gratitude for his constituents and team of supporters, Evers's

8-minute-long victory speech allowed those who have not supported him in the past to see how he will continue to lead this state toward sustainable progress for all Wisconsinites.

References

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