

When ex-President Donald Trump endorsed Harriet Hageman's primary challenge to Wyoming Rep. Liz Cheney last month, he called her "strong on Crime and Borders, powerfully supports the Second Amendment, loves our Military and our Vets, and will fight for Election Integrity and Energy Independence."

He didn't mention the fact that Hageman had been part of an effort to keep the presidential nomination from him at the 2016 Republican National Convention.

As The New York Times reported earlier this week:

"Calling Mr. Trump 'the weakest candidate,' Ms. Hageman attributed his rise to Democrats who she claimed had voted in Republican primaries.

"She condemned Mr. Trump as a bigoted candidate who would repel voters Republicans needed to win a national election, warning that the G.O.P. would be saddled with 'somebody who is racist and xenophobic.' "

What happened to *that* Harriet Hageman? Well, Trump won -- not just the Republican nomination but also the White House. And Hageman rapidly changed her tune.

"I heard and believed the lies the Democrats and Liz Cheney's friends in the media were telling at the time, but that is ancient history as I quickly realized that their allegations against President Trump were untrue," Hageman told the Times about her past criticism of Trump. "He was the greatest president of my lifetime, and I am proud to have been able to renominate him in 2020. And I'm proud to strongly support him today,"

Hageman didn't have some sort of epiphany about Trump. Instead, she, like so many other Republicans who expressed considerable doubt about the prospect of the billionaire businessman leading their party, simply caved to political expedience.

The base of the GOP loved Trump. And it became clear after he was elected that there was simply no political ground to be made up in opposing him on principled grounds. (Just ask former Arizona Sen. Jeff Flake how that approach worked for his political career.)

And so Hageman, no dummy and ambitious for office (she finished third in the 2018 Republican primary for governor), threw her lot -- all of it -- in with Trump.

Don't believe Hageman's flip-flop on Trump was politically motivated? Consider what she thought about Cheney, the woman she is running to beat next year, as recently as 2016.

"I know that Liz Cheney is a proven, courageous, constitutional conservative, someone who has the education, the background and experience to fight effectively for Wyoming on a national stage," Hageman said at the time. "There have been and will continue to be concerted efforts to force true conservatives to sit down and shut up. Those efforts have never worked on me and I know that they will not work on and have no effect on Liz Cheney. I am proud to introduce Liz Cheney as the next congressional representative from the great state of Wyoming."

What's changed in the intervening five years, you ask, that would so radically alter Hageman's views on Cheney?

Certainly not the congresswoman's conservative bona fides. Cheney currently has a 96% rating from Heritage Action, the conservative policy advocacy organization. (Her lifetime score is 80%.) According to VoteView, Cheney's voting record is more conservative than 74% of the House in the 117th Congress.

What changed is that Trump attacked Cheney because she laid blame for the January 6 insurrection at his feet and was one of 10 House Republicans who voted to impeach him for his conduct that day.

That split between Cheney and Trump created an opportunity. And Hageman, clearly an opportunist, leaped at it. Even if it required her to wholly abandon -- in the most transparent way possible -- her past views on both Trump and Cheney.

This is what Trumpism has wrought in the Republican Party. Because the former President requires total, unquestioning loyalty, the likes of Hageman are willing to do whatever it takes to win his support. Even if it includes going back on everything you once said you believed.