

# 77th AD Dem primary candidates have varied experience, different priorities

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It wasn't long after she announced her retirement that Dem Terese Berceau backed Dane County Supervisor Shelia Stubbs to replace her as the representative of Madison's deep blue 77th AD.

Stubbs believes she's ready to make the jump from county to state government.

"Many people urged me to run, because they've seen what I've been able to do as an elected official, as an advocate, as a neighborhood organizer. I'll be effective, I'll be bold, and I'll do it with passion," she said in an interview with WisPolitics.com this week.

Stubbs said she'd make criminal justice reform and funding K-12 and higher education priorities in office.

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Still, Berceau's support hadn't stopped three other candidates from jumping into the fray.

"I think we should have competitive elections," said Wisconsin Brewers Guild executive director Mark Garthwaite, who joined the race in April.

Garthwaite, a former molecular biology research specialist, believes his experience puts him in a prime position to advocate for increased funding for the UW System, one of the chief issues he's running on. He argues the Legislature has far too many attorneys, and believes his science perspective is sorely needed on the Assembly's Science and Technology Committee.

Garthwaite's priorities in office would be to increase funding for the UW System, repairing its relationship with the Legislature and making sure Department of Natural Resources science professionals have a direct role in guiding environmental policy.

Meanwhile, immigration attorney Shabnam Lotfi says her law school experience sets her up well to be a member of the Assembly.

"Having that type of an education is critical when you're making and passing laws," she said. "I'm a strategist."

And Lotfi, who is 36, believes her age is an asset that can help revive the Democratic Party in the spirit of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a 28-year-old Democratic socialist who beat out an incumbent Democratic congressman in New York.

"The Democratic Party needs CPR," Lotfi said. "We're like dead — we need some energy."

Lotfi also said she'd prioritize an overhaul of the state's political boundaries mirroring the system in Iowa, champion a single payer healthcare system and reduce the influence of money in politics, which is why she's capping individual donations she accepts at \$1,000 per person.

Wisconsin Environmental Initiative Executive Director John Imes believes the state Democratic Party has also reached a current "low point," but said his experience working with small businesses and those he disagrees with politically are key attributes to resuscitating it.

"We want to be a state that has a soul," Imes said. "Who can be effective not only within the Democratic caucus but in terms of his ability to engage the other side on high road progressive policies and make the business case for ... clean energy or a living fair wage or family friendly benefits?"

He pointed to two Republicans — Reps. Joel Kitchens and Amy Loudenberg — as lawmakers he'd work with if elected.

He said he'd focus on increasing funding in the UW System and for the environment by revitalizing the DNR and promoting renewable energy, which he said could bring new jobs into the state.

The four Democrats agree on several broad measures, such as continuing the UW tuition freeze and making the state pay for it.

Each of the candidates also opposes constitutional carry, which would allow gun owners to carry a weapon without a permit. And the candidates all would at least consider a 5-cent-per-gallon increase in the gas tax to increase funding for the state's transportation system, with differences on other funding options.

Stubbs argued lawmakers should look to the Department of Transportation secretary for expert advice on transportation funding. She came out against tolling, knocking it as inefficient and balking at its requirement of federal approval. She said she'd prefer imposing a higher gas tax than increasing vehicle registration fees.

Imes said increasing the gas tax is "totally reasonable" and added he'd want it to be indexed to the rate of inflation. But he argued the state also needs to look at shaving costs on mega-projects in southeastern Wisconsin.

"I think our priorities are a bit out of whack," he said.

Like Stubbs, Imes opposes increasing registration fees or implementing a tolling system, but said he could get behind an idea like imposing a fee on heavy trucks since they do more damage to the road system than the average vehicle.

Lotfi said she's open to considering an increased gas tax as well as indexing it. But she wants to consider all options — such as looking at potential revenue from marijuana legalization or decreasing incarcerations costs — before increasing costs for Wisconsinites.

"I worry about the ordinary American," Lotfi said. "I want to protect those families, not make an incredibly burdened lifestyle more difficult."

Garthwaite says he'd consider all options for funding the state's road system, although he's against tolling. One funding solution he said he'd like brought to the table is imposing fees on frac sand, an idea he said he learned from Republicans.

Each candidate supported prioritizing alternative sentencing options over building new prisons, although both Stubbs and Lotfi expressed more interest than Garthwaite and Imes in replacing two of the state oldest prisons in Green Bay and Waupun.

Hear Stubbs' interview:

<https://soundcloud.com/wispolitics/shelia-stubbs-candidate-interview>

Hear Garthwaite's:

<https://soundcloud.com/wispolitics/mark-garthwaite-candidate-interview>

Hear Lofti's:

<https://soundcloud.com/wispolitics/shabnam-lotfi-candidate-interview>

Hear Imes':

<https://soundcloud.com/wispolitics/john-imes-candidate-interview>