

Bill Kaplan: On to November, Evers vs Walker?

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Odds are Tony Evers, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, will win Tuesday's Democratic primary for governor. Why? The low-key Evers has stamina and is down-to-earth. He has run statewide and won three consecutive elections (two while Scott Walker was governor), And, as the Atlantic August 8 headline said: "The Wisconsin Governor's Race Might Be Decided By Education". Moreover, Evers has worked in education across Wisconsin. All the polls show him to be the front-runner in the Democratic primary, while beating Walker by wide margins in two recent polls. Apparently Walker agrees and his campaign has already begun what it excels in, negative attacks against Evers.

However, time is running out for Walker. The long-time politician has spent virtually his entire adult life running for and holding public office. On top of that, Walker has one failed presidential run under his belt. He became a laughing-stock in the national press when he compared teachers and public employees to Islamic State terrorists. There is exhaustion with Walker's ambition, his relentless negative campaigns, as well as the chaos and division sown by him. Meanwhile, enthusiasm has been building for change. Walker, supposedly "unintimidated", will have to run on his long record and issues such as education and health care.

Although GOP Governor Walker is now running as a "pro-education governor" (with some election-year increased spending), the past is prologue: Walker cut \$800 million from kindergarten through high school, demonized teachers, diverted public funds to private schools (vouchers) and cut \$500 million from the UW-System, while downplaying its role as an economic powerhouse for Wisconsin. Evers says he is running for governor because he is "sick and tired of Scott Walker gutting our public schools, insulting our hard-working educators and destroying higher education in Wisconsin." More.

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Election-year Walker just got approval for a Wisconsin Affordable Care Act (ACA) reinsurance program to help private insurers with high-cost enrollees. It will reduce premiums shooting up from Trump's sabotage of the ACA. Here's the rub. In a breathtakingly cynical move, Walker gave the go ahead to Wisconsin GOP Attorney General Brad Schimel to join a lawsuit to have the ACA declared unconstitutional. The American Medical Association said the consequences would be catastrophic: "Patients would no longer have protections for preexisting conditions (852,000 Wisconsinites, Kaiser Family Foundation); Children would no longer have coverage under their parents' health insurance plan until age 26; ...(and) Annual and life-time dollar limits could be reinstated, leading to more bankruptcies due to health care costs." Evers says Walker "has chosen to pick political fights instead of working together to lower our health care costs". Evers, unlike Walker, supports taking federal funds for Medicaid expansion. Common sense.

In 2015, former GOP state Senator Dale Schultz told me that "the hangover from Walker will be spectacular". The chickens have come home to roost. Regular folks want government to be on their side, making their lives better. If Evers wins on Tuesday and in November, I hope he will ask Schultz to serve in his cabinet.

— Kaplan wrote a guest column from Washington, D.C. for the Wisconsin State Journal from 1995 - 2009.