

# Dem gov candidates at forum pledge to invest in Wisconsinites, overhaul prison system

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Seven Dem gov candidates in a candidate forum last night pledged to invest in the people of Wisconsin and overhaul elements of the state's incarceration system.

"We are going to be investing in regular folks," state Rep. Dana Wachs told attendees at a forum hosted by WISDOM in Pewaukee. The other contenders who attended were: former state Rep. Kelda Roys, former Dem Party Chair Matt Flynn, activist Mike McCabe, state firefighters union head Mahlon Mitchell, Milwaukee businessman Andy Gronik and state Sen. Kathleen Vinehout.

The contenders each got 5 minutes to speak at the event, after facing a series of questions from WISDOM members ranging from health care to transportation to the criminal justice system.

During their speeches, Wachs and Vinehout called for prioritizing individuals over corporations. Wachs, who sits on the Wisconsin Economic Development Board, noted he's been "fighting that Foxconn thing since they rolled it out" and knocked it as "not an investment in people."

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Vinehout also retold the story of "Rachel," a woman in Racine who works 40 hours per week on minimum wage. It's an anecdote the Alma senator had used in her speech to the state Dem convention earlier this month. She drew a contrast between spending money on Foxconn and spending on people, saying the state's "priorities are upside down."

Gronik, meanwhile, stressed policies that would ensure everyone "in the state of

Wisconsin has a voice.” He also pointed to the challenge the state GOP brought against his nomination paper signatures, including allegations not all circulators were qualified electors of the state and included convicted felons, and noted the campaign knew the individuals’ backgrounds.

“We got up in front of the cameras and not only did we not disavow this (their ties to the campaign), we embraced the fact that this is how we run Wisconsin going forward,” Gronik said.

Meanwhile, Mitchell and McCabe prioritized overhauling the state’s treatment of African Americans.

Mitchell, who would become the state’s first African American governor if elected, told attendees while the state is “the worst place in the country to be African American,” he’d look to end the “school- to-prison pipeline” and invest more in communities to turn it around.

And McCabe called for ending “the new Jim Crow” system. The system, he said, stands on “voter suppression policies,” mass incarceration and a new policing philosophy: “intimidate and control.”

Flynn, an attorney, used the first part of his speech to “set the record straight” on his legal defense of the Milwaukee Archdiocese during the priest sexual abuse scandal, which has gotten media attention in recent weeks.

He also touted his promise to pardon anyone in Wisconsin’s prisons serving time for nonviolent marijuana offenses.

And Roys looked to distinguish herself from the other candidates, saying her experience in the Assembly and as a mother, attorney and small business owner means she has the “experience to get the job done on day one.”

“We need someone with the values to put all Wisconsin families first and we need someone that could win,” she said.

The candidates also all agreed they’d support legislation to allow for the creation of regional transit authorities, which are overseen by a board of directors and allowed to operate a transportation system or contract to do so.

The state in 2009 passed legislation to allow the creation of the authorities in

different communities, but the Republicans' 2011 biennial budget eliminated the initiative and dissolved the RTAs that had been created in Dane County, the Chippewa Valley in the Eau Claire area and Chequamegon Bay in the Ashland area.

The agreement came in the first portion of the forum, during which candidates were asked a series of questions by WISDOM members on a variety of topics ranging from health care to transportation. The contenders had to hold up a green card to signify they would support the given policy if elected governor, a red card if they disagreed and a yellow card if they were uncertain.

The seven candidates in all agreed with each of the questions. That includes support for a \$15 million-per-year increase in Treatment Alternatives and Diversion, or TAD, funding in the first budget; as well as the reintroduction of the so-called "Prove It First" mining law.

The 20-year-old law, which created a so-called "moratorium" on sulfide mining, was overturned this session after a GOP-backed effort ended a requirement companies seeking a sulfide mining permit must prove they operated for 10 years and were closed for 10 years without polluting groundwater or surface water, among other things.

And they each agreed to support background checks for all gun sales, including those made at gun shows and between private parties.

Watch a WisEye video of the first hour of the forum:

<https://www.facebook.com/WisconsinEye/videos/10157592246280200/>