

Dem gov candidates knock Walker, highlight differences in candidate forum

Posted on Friday, Aug 10, 2018

The Dem gov candidates put down Gov. Scott Walker and highlighted their liberal credentials in what was likely their last candidate forum ahead of Tuesday's primary.

Seven of the eight seven contenders sought to distinguish themselves from the field in a variety of ways in their second downtown Madison event this week.

State Sen. Kathleen Vinehout and Kelda Roys, a former state rep, each highlighted their legislative experience, while activist Mike McCabe touted his commitment to get big money out of politics.

Meanwhile, Madison Mayor Paul Soglin pledged to promote intra-party unity and prioritize health care and public education. Kenosha attorney Josh Pade referred to his experience working in former U.S. Sen. Russ Feingold's office and called for building consensus to move forward.

>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)

State firefighters union head Mahlon Mitchell, who missed Wednesday's debate, told audience members the state needs to do something new and different, adding Walker "does not have a playbook for me."

And former Dem Party Chair Matt Flynn, who in recent days has been knocking his Dem gov rivals, kicked off his opening remarks highlighting what would be lost if Walker won re-election again: unions, public education and the UW System, and more.

“This is not a dress rehearsal. The choice you make on Nov. 6 is going to determine the fate of everybody and everything I just described,” Flynn said, adding he doesn’t believe the rest of the field has “the fire or the experience to beat” the gov.

State schools Superintendent Tony Evers, who has been leading public released polls heading into the primary, was unable to attend the forum sponsored by the Dane County Dem Party due to an official DPI event in Oneida, his campaign said.

— Asked about what she’d do to protect women’s access to abortion, Vinehout pledged to work with the Legislature to repeal a series of bills passed by the Republican-controlled Assembly and Senate since 2010.

That includes the 20-week abortion ban, a law that requires women considering an abortion to first have an ultrasound performed, sending more money to women’s health clinics like Planned Parenthood and more.

The Alma Dem noted her sister almost died from a self-induced abortion.

“If we don’t have access to safe and locally available women’s health services, women are going to die, it’s that serious,” she said.

Also during the event, the moderators asked McCabe — the only Dem gov candidate who hasn’t pledged to support the eventual nominee — which contender he would refuse to endorse in the field.

McCabe declined to answer, instead saying again that it’s a “mistake to make party loyalty pledges,” as he noted that there was party unity behind Dem gov candidate Mary Burke in 2014, though she ended up losing to Walker.

“The problem is that outside of the friendly confines of Madison, that party loyalty pledge is heard differently,” he said. “They don’t hear it as Democrats being unified. What they hear is Democrats saying party is more important than anything.”

But Soglin later fired back at McCabe, saying his commitment to supporting the winner of the primary didn’t amount to a “partisan pledge.”

“My pledge is not based on any bargaining or negotiations; it is a pledge to support the candidate and beat Scott Walker,” he said.

The candidates were also asked about the biggest challenges facing rural and urban

Wisconsin.

Both Vinehout and Roys highlighted poverty and a lack of economic opportunity. Roys said the state's rural areas have seen a "divestment" in recent years, as infrastructure and educational resources have been removed from those communities.

Soglin called for setting up public-private community-based health clinics throughout the state that are accessible regardless of the national fight over health care, while McCabe talked about the importance of expanding health care access and implementing "Badgercare for all."

Mitchell pledged to bring different stakeholders to the table to tackle issues such as a lack of economic opportunity; Pade called for addressing income inequality, stagnant wages and student loan debt; and Flynn zeroed in on racial segregation, as he called for enforcing non-discrimination laws.