

Laning sees big opportunity for Dems in 2018 ahead of state convention

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Gov. Scott Walker has been claiming that his Dem opponents are fueled by anger and hatred.

State Dem Chair Martha Laning isn't buying it.

"It's not our party who is actually comparing a U.S. senator to a terrorist. It's not our party who is claiming if you don't believe what I believe and you're a veteran, there's something wrong with you," Laning said, referring to comments from GOP U.S. Senate candidates Leah Vukmir and Kevin Nicholson.

"I think the Republican Party and Donald Trump on a regular basis spews out a lot of hate."

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As Dems gather this weekend in Oshkosh for their annual state convention, Laning sees 2018 as a huge opportunity for the party she'd led since 2015. Dems were shocked in 2016 as Trump won Wisconsin, the first GOP presidential candidate to do that since 1984, and Republicans built up their biggest majorities in the Legislature since the 1950s.

Since then, Dems have won a special election in the 10th SD by 10 points after Trump won it by 17 in 2016, and liberal Milwaukee County Judge Rebecca Dallet won a race for an open Supreme Court seat by nearly a dozen points.

In a new WisPolitics.com interview to preview the convention, Laning said the party's infrastructure played a role in both wins, outright backing Patty Schachtner

in the 10th SD and focusing on voter turnout in the Supreme Court race.

Laning ran in 2015 on a platform of empowering local Dem officials and said the fruits of that labor are starting to show up after three years at the helm.

“We don’t have a top-down relationship with people,” she said. “We’re empowering them and asking them, ‘What is it that you want to get out there and share with your community? What are the issues important to you, and how can we help you to do that?’”

Ten gov candidates are slated to address the convention this evening, after meeting the party’s requirements to qualify for a speaking spot.

None of the contenders so far has been able to break away from the pack financially, and some have suggested the crowded field has made it harder for contenders to draw attention.

Laning, though, said the field is unified in its focus on criticizing Walker’s shortcomings, including questions surrounding the \$4.5 billion public cost for Foxconn’s plant in southeastern Wisconsin. That price tag includes a nearly \$3 billion package from the state that Laning said is a bad deal for taxpayers.

Walker has accused his Dem opponents of rooting for the project’s failure, a notion that Laning rejected.

“We’re going to spend \$4 billion of Wisconsin taxpayer money,” she said. “I do not want this to falter. I don’t want Wisconsin taxpayers to get nothing for their investment. No, we do not want that to happen.”

Instead, Laning focused on the public cost vs. the benefit. She argued the state could have invested that money in other areas: local entrepreneurs, who could then have created more jobs on the investment than the 13,000 Foxconn is promising; roads, which she said are among the worst in the nation; and public schools, which she said are hurting for resources.

That Walker decided to put so much money into one incentive package shows he and his team aren’t very adept at negotiating a good, quality deal with a business, she said.

That’s especially true, she said, when you consider the resources Wisconsin already

had to offer than the company wanted.

“They came here, because they want our water and instead of saying, ‘Hey, you can have the water and now you give something to us,’ we rolled out a \$4 billion deal on top of the water,” Laning said.

Listen to the full interview:

<https://soundcloud.com/wispolitics/160529laning/s-vXmMk>

This post is part of our coverage of the 2018 state Dem convention in Oshkosh. See the rest of our coverage here: <https://www.wispolitics.com/category/dem-convos/>