

Vinehout says voters should consider her experience and performance, not gender

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With frustrations stemming from the national MeToo movement, some pundits are projecting 2018 will turn out to be a “Year of the Woman.”

But Sen. Kathleen Vinehout, one of two top candidates in the Dem gov race, said at a WisPolitics.com luncheon Thursday she’s not leading with her female identity. The three-time gov candidate stressed voters should consider her experience and performance under pressure over her potentially being the first female governor.

“I would hope that people would look at the content of my character and not my gender,” the western Wisconsin Dem said.

When she ran for state Senate in 2006, Vinehout said some voters — chiefly white male farmers — brought up her gender. But she said it took joining the Senate in 2007 to realize how stacked the deck was against women in politics.

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“When I came to the Senate in 2007, I thought I was walking back in time 40 years,” she said.

http://www.wiseye.org/mp4stream/EVT/EVT_180308_WISPOL.mp4

For Vinehout, an intra-Democratic coup that replaced then-Senate Dem Leader Judy Robson with Sen. Russ Decker was an eye opener.

“I heard from my Democratic colleagues — [Robson’s] not muscular enough, she’s

not forthright enough, she's not strong enough. Well, that was malarkey. Frankly, it was sexism."

Since then, Vinehout said the climate in her caucus has changed, with a growing number of female lawmakers and Jennifer Shilling as Dem minority leader, adding, "If we have a woman governor, that's fantastic."

Vinehout during the question-and-answer session appeared to suggest that a woman governor would likely reduce instances of sexual harassment in the Capitol.

"If there was a female governor, the research tells us that the leadership of an organization matters when it comes to sexual harassment in an organization," she said.

Vinehout then appeared to half-heartedly backtrack before again embracing her argument.

"That's supposed to be a joke. Well, it's true. But think about it. If your boss is female, are you really going to ogle the lower-level staff when they walk away from you? You're going to think twice," she added.

Vinehout also explained her abortion rights stance, for which she has been criticized in the past.

"I've never gotten 100 percent with 100 percent of groups," Vinehout acknowledged.

Former state lawmaker and congressional candidate Kelda Roys of Dane County has previously called herself "the only pro-choice woman" in the gubernatorial race. Roys previously served as executive director of NARAL Pro-Choice Wisconsin, an abortion rights group.

In contrast, Vinehout has worked with Democrats for Life, an anti-abortion group, and during her 2006 state Senate campaign said she supported current law, which meant a 24-hour waiting period for abortions and a parental consent law. Further, in 2009 Vinehout was the only Democratic senator to vote with Republicans against confirming three doctors to state medical boards who received criticism from anti-abortion groups.

And Planned Parenthood in 2009 voted to rescind its endorsement of Vinehout after

she offered an amendment to allow pharmacists with ethical and religious objections to opt out of dispensing birth control.

Vinehout Thursday said her amendment has been mischaracterized, and that she introduced it to bring state law in line with the Wisconsin constitution and court decisions in other states while protecting a woman's right to contraception.

She underscored her pro-choice stance by referencing the story of her sister, who nearly died after a self-induced abortion.

And Vinehout interjected after an audience member referenced Roys' claim she is the only pro-choice female gov candidate.

"I'm pro-choice, also," she said.