

WisDems: Day 2 of signature collection: Still no viable Republican candidate in Speaker Ryan's district

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Deep "bench" of Republican hopefuls intimidated by "#bluewave"

MADISON — Five days after Speaker Paul Ryan announced his retirement from Congress, Wisconsin Republicans still haven't found a candidate to run in WI-01, a district with a deep bench of Republican hopefuls that Paul Ryan carried for the last 20 years and where he never received less than 55% of the vote.

"The Republican Party's agenda is even scaring Republicans away," said Martha Laning, chair of the Democratic Party of Wisconsin. "The GOP agenda of giving tax cuts to the ultra wealthy while sabotaging health care for the rest of us is so toxic Republicans can't even find someone to run in a district they've held for more than 20 years. Republicans are simply in disarray."

Wisconsin Republicans have suffered two major losses so far in 2018 — in January, Sen. Patty Schachtner flipped a Senate seat that went 17 points for Trump, and just this month Judge Rebecca Dallet was elected to the Wisconsin Supreme Court by 12 points by a spring electorate that normally favors conservative candidates. After both losses, Gov. Scott Walker took to Twitter expressing fear of a "#bluewave."

This morning, Rep. Joel Kleefisch became the 12th Republican in the Assembly not to seek re-election this year when he announced his retirement after serving 14 years in the Wisconsin State Assembly. Republicans are choosing to throw in the towel rather than face a potential defeat in November.

Even in the 1st congressional district where the bench of Republicans is deep, the Speaker of the Wisconsin State Assembly Robin Vos, the former Wisconsin GOP chair Reince Priebus and state Sen. David Craig, a former aide to Paul Ryan, have all declined a run in a district which until this year has been a safe Republican seat. The only Republican candidate currently running is white supremacist Paul Nehlen who was recently banned from Twitter for racist posts.

“Republicans know that voters are fired up and ready to send them packing,” added Laning. “Scott Walker knows it, Republicans in the Legislature know it, Paul Ryan knows it, and the deep bench of potential Republican candidates in the 1st congressional district knows it too. When you attack workers’ rights and try to take health care away from millions while doling out tax cuts to your wealthy donors, you’re going to find that the public doesn’t support you.

“Wisconsin voters are ready to elect leaders who embrace our Wisconsin values. I’m thrilled that we have two great Democratic candidates running to represent the interests of Wisconsinites in the 1st district.

“People want to be represented by leaders who believe in health care for all, who will fully fund our classrooms and build an economy that works for everyone, not just those at the top. Voters are realizing that the division and extremism of Republican leadership has left them behind and that Democratic leadership embraces their Wisconsin values and supports their interests.”