

# Dem Party chair candidates say party has to do more to compete with Republicans

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The two candidates to become the next Dem state chair — Rep. David Bowen and former MoveOn.org senior adviser Ben Wikler — both say the party needs to do a better job of competing with its GOP counterpart.

They each, though, have a slightly different emphasis.

In separate interviews with WisPolitics.com this week, both candidates were asked to identify the party's biggest weakness.

Bowen, D-Milwaukee, said he'd like to see the party do a better job of going into "red" areas of Wisconsin rather than focusing so much on Madison and Milwaukee. He also believes the party needs to rebuild its credibility with communities of color by showing up more than just around election time.

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Wikler said the party has "an enormous wealth" of energy, experience and resilience from its recent fights in the state. Still, he said the party has fallen behind the GOP in how it organizes and provides information to the grassroots.

Wikler said he would try to take the party to "the very cutting edge of how to win elections in the 21st century" if elected.

"Democrats should be leapfrogging Republicans when it comes to text messages, social media and data, rather than struggling to catch up," Wikler said.

Bowen and Wikler both said they would want to see the party compete in every

legislative seat next fall, not just the ones where they'd have a better chance of winning. Wikler said letting Republicans run up margins in red counties would result in President Trump winning Wisconsin again, pointing out Waukesha County has the third most number of Dem voters in the state despite voting reliably for Republicans as a whole.

Bowen, though, says the party has focused too much on the state's "blue" areas, leading to divisions. Focusing on areas such as Madison and Milwaukee, he said, can be just enough to get over the top in a statewide race.

But he said it leads to people feeling neglected when the party doesn't do a better job of trying to turn out Dems no matter where they live. Likewise, he said the party needs a more regular presence with minority voters.

"We know in certain areas of the state they are the only ones that have a message and ground game," Bowen said of Republicans. "There are a number of communities, especially communities of color, when they are given access to engagement and support, it's at the very, very, very last minute. We are having transactional conversations with folks and people are only expecting us to come around at election time, and it kills our credibility in those areas with those communities."

Voting in the chair's race runs from 8 a.m. to noon Sunday with the party hoping to announce a winner by early afternoon. Only delegates are allowed to vote, and some 1,800 have expressed an interest in attending the convention, according to a party spokeswoman.

But fewer than that are expected to cast ballots. In 2017, when outgoing Chair Martha Laning won re-election during a convention in Middleton, there were about 1,400 votes.

Laning said she isn't endorsing in the race. Gov. Tony Evers and U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin, D-Madison, also aren't publicly backing either candidate.

Listen to the Bowen interview:

[https://soundcloud.com/wispolitics/190530\\_0832a/s-CaNjx](https://soundcloud.com/wispolitics/190530_0832a/s-CaNjx)

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