

Madison Dems looking at Risser seat as longtime incumbent announces retirement

Posted on Friday, Mar 27, 2020

Madison Dems quickly expressed an interest in running for Sen. Fred Risser's Senate seat after the 92-year-old announced he won't seek reelection after more than six decades in the Legislature.

But Rep. Chris Taylor, who had been considered a top candidate to run for Risser's seat once he retired, won't be one of them. She announced yesterday she won't seek reelection to her Assembly seat or run for the Senate this fall.

Former state Rep. Kelda Roys, who ran for gov two years ago, announced on Twitter she is seeking the post. Scot Ross, a longtime activist who unsuccessfully challenged Doug LaFollette for secretary of state in the 2006 Dem primary, said he is considering a bid. Dems also say state Rep. Sheila Stubbs, who won her Assembly seat in 2018, is expected to consider a bid.

Roys said yesterday she has been thinking about running for some time but wanted to wait for Risser to make his decision first.

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On Twitter today, Roys praised Risser while announcing her bid.

"Exciting news! I'm running for State Senate, to succeed Sen. Fred Risser. His service is an inspiration, and I'm excited to get to work building a Democratic majority and enacting progressive legislation for Wisconsin," she tweeted

Ross, who most recently worked for the liberal group One Wisconsin Now before going into the private sector, said he will make a decision soon about a run.

“With Trump in the White House and these Republicans running the state Legislature, it won’t be enough to just vote the right way on the Senate floor — Democrats will want a leader in this district who won’t stop until we get Gov. Evers a Democratic majority in the Senate,” he said.

Three Dems had already registered to run for Risser’s seat prior to his announcement: William Henry Davis III, a write-in candidate for Lt. gov in 2018; Nada Elmikashfi, whose website says she will graduate from UW-Madison in May and is a member of the Sustainable Madison Committee; and Aisha Suraya Moe, who graduated from UW-Madison in December.

Rep. Lisa Subeck, who along with Stubbs and Taylor is one of the three Dem reps representing portions of Risser’s Senate district, said she plans to seek reelection to the Assembly.

Risser, 92, is in his 64th year as a Wisconsin legislator, making him the longest-serving state or national legislator in U.S. history.

His office also said he is the last World War II veteran still remaining in either the state or nation’s legislatures.

Risser, an attorney, was elected to the Assembly in 1956 before winning his Senate seat in 1962 and going on to serve in various leadership roles in the chamber, including Senate president.

Risser’s decision brings to an end four generations of the Risser family serving in the state Legislature. The Risser Justice Center stands on the Capitol Square.

His great-grandfather Clement Warner served as a Unionist in the state Senate from 1867-68 before serving in the state Assembly in 1883 as a Republican.

His grandfather Ernest Waner was elected to the Assembly in 1904 as a Progressive Republican, and his father Fred E. Risser was the last Progressive member of the state Senate, elected initially in 1936. He lost reelection in 1948 in a four-way race that included Gaylord Nelson, who won the seat and later became gov and U.S. senator.

*See Risser’s announcement: <https://www.wispolitics.com/2020/sen-risser-to-retire-after-64-years/>

*See a July 2010 interview with Risser on the eve of the state's workplace smoking ban that he championed going into effect:

<https://www.wispolitics.com/2020/interview-with-sen-fred-risser-july-2010/>

This story has been updated with Roys' announcement that she is running for the seat.