

Dem U.S. Senate candidates target Johnson in pitches to Dem state convention

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Dem U.S. Senate candidates addressing this weekend's virtual state Dem convention pitched their platforms and slammed incumbent GOP U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson.

Outagamie County Executive Tom Nelson criticized Johnson, R-Oshkosh, and other wealthy politicians and contrasted his experience working as a public servant in the Assembly and three-time county executive.

"This race ought not to be a competition of bank accounts or pedigrees, that is not who we are," he said. "Two-thirds of the U.S. Senate are millionaires, including Ron Johnson. Adding another billionaire or millionaire is not the answer."

He added any Dem candidate who wants to win the seat in 2022 will have to work to win the rural counties he says the Dem Party has forgotten over the past few years.

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State Treasurer Sarah Godlewski also took jabs at Johnson, saying, "Wisconsinites deserve so much better than McCarthyism 2.0," who she said is out of touch with reality.

She said her immediate focus if elected to the position would be to get rid of the filibuster. Godlewski also said she would focus on passing legislation to protect voting rights, fund infrastructure projects and raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour.

"I believe in fighting for kitchen table issues that will actually help working families," she said. "As a working mom, I understand the importance of affordable childcare and paid family leave. Right now the system is not built for moms and people of color."

Wausau radiologist Dr. Gillian Battino was the only candidate not to mention Johnson in her five-minute speech, but said she would focus on getting affordable healthcare for everyone if elected.

"It's time for Medicare for all," she said. "Health care is a human right, it's not a privilege, and that's why I'm stepping up."

She added her 20 years of experience as a physician working with the World Health Organization and other international and national groups gives her a leg up on dealing with health care. She added it's important to also address the racial and economic inequities in the health care system.

"We are the wealthiest country in the world," Battino said. "America is the land of the free, but if you have to choose between your health and financial ruin, you are not free."

Alex Lasry, who's taking a leave of absence from his role as a senior vice president with the Milwaukee Bucks, said Johnson needs to go. He said wants to take his seat and provide U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin, D-Madison, the Dem Wisconsin wingman she's been missing for the past 10 years.

Johnson hasn't announced whether he'll seek reelection to a third term.

Lasry added he would focus on increasing the minimum wage to \$15 an hour to help struggling families have more financial freedom and stability, adding the Bucks already pay all of their employees at least \$15 an hour.

And he said his campaign would focus on racial and social justice, drug incarceration and recidivism, and voting rights

"These are the values that we're going to be expressing throughout the campaign," Lasry said. "That progressive values are not only good for business, are not just good for the economy, but are also good for the country."

Millennial Action Project founder Steven Olikara said his campaign would focus

primarily on values rather than specific policies.

“I think leading with our values is the most powerful expression of democratic change,” Olikara said.

He said those values would focus on creating dignity for everyone.

He said focusing on values in the past led to the removal of Jim Crow laws and the ending of British rule over India, and that focusing on values now will lead to even more powerful change in the future.

Olikara has formed an exploratory committee but hasn't yet formally declared a bid.

State Sen. Chris Larson, D-Milwaukee, said he will focus on “ending the creeping, festering fascism that's overtaking America.”

He said he's running to replace Johnson because he wants to make sure Wisconsin doesn't have a senator who just represents his own interests in D.C. He added he wants to restore dignity once Johnson is out and make sure government works for everybody instead of the wealthy few.

He said creating universal healthcare for all and addressing issues within the health care system itself will be important in working to “unrig” the system. He also said he would push for the Green New Deal and a wealth tax.

Republican National Committee spokesperson Preya Samsundar knocked what she called Democrats' “failed socialist policies” ahead of the speeches.

“Wisconsinites will hear more of the same failed socialist policies that make it more expensive to live the American dream,” Samsundar said. “Instead of celebrating stimmy shimmies that are crushing small businesses with historic labor shortages, Democrats should focus on listening to the science, re-open the state, and actually make an appearance in Wisconsin.”