

Evers campaign: “Hell yes” – Gov. Evers is ready to run for re-election

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MADISON, Wis. — Today, the Capital Times [profiled](#) Gov. Tony Evers’ re-election bid and whether he is “up for the fight?”

Gov. Evers’ emphatic answer?

“Hell yes.”

During Gov. Evers’ first term, he has brought common-sense leadership and Wisconsin values back to the governor’s office. Gov. Evers has a strong record of getting things done for Wisconsinites, including cutting taxes for the middle class by 15 percent, fixing thousands of miles of roads and bridges, expanding affordable internet access, increasing funding for our public schools, and supporting small businesses and family farms.

When asked about Republicans’ desire to make the 2022 gubernatorial election a race about education, Gov. Evers, a former science teacher and lifelong educator, told the Capital Times: **“Bring it on.”**

The stakes are high in Wisconsin, and Gov. Evers knows that this is going to be a close race. That’s why he’s building a campaign that is ready to win. So far, Gov. Evers has [posted](#) historic fundraising numbers and invested in crucial grassroots organizing that’s reaching out to Wisconsinites in every corner of the state — and he’s just getting started.

Whether it’s access to healthcare, funding public education, or continuing to improve our infrastructure, Gov. Evers knows Wisconsin can make even more progress. That’s why Gov. Evers is running for re-election: to continue moving our state forward.

Read the Capital Times' story below.

Capital Times: [Tony Evers is running for reelection. Is he up for the fight?](#)

A quiet Gov. Tony Evers sat in the back seat of his usual blacked-out SUV, his head and shoulders outlined by the sun pouring through the car's window. The car was parked on the side of the road just blocks away from his next stump stop in Milwaukee. On one side of the street was an industrial building from yesteryear; on the other, a small, cream-colored house with an overgrown yard.

In a rare occurrence in politics, the governor was ahead of schedule during a multi-city swing for a series of canvassing and campaign events. Timing is everything in politics — so to avoid spoiling the spectacle of his arrival at the next stop, he sat, patient and silent, as his staff mused in the car's third row.

After a few moments, he ruffled through his briefcase — a worn, gray bag you'd expect to find at the feet of a schoolteacher and, maybe not, a governor (Evers, of course, began his professional career in education working as a teacher).

The governor pulled his iPhone from the bag.

"I have no idea what I'm expected to do here," he said in response to a message from his youngest daughter, readjusting his mask after pulling it down for a flash to trigger the phone's Face ID technology.

He read aloud: "Can you ask mom if she's giving the Mario thing to Keyton (Evers' grandson) for his birthday? I texted her and she hasn't responded. But maybe she's at pickleball?"

"I'm not sure how I fix this. Have any thoughts?" he quipped to his fellow passengers.

That moment and that day embody Evers: A grandpa and a governor who — including in this newspaper — has often been described as bland and boring. But maybe that's an oversimplification of Wisconsin's 46th governor.

That Saturday, Nov. 6, the governor sported black New Balance sneakers, worn blue jeans and a Wisconsin Badgers quarter-zip. The trip came the day after Evers' 70th birthday — a milestone that, despite birthday wishes at each campaign event, he was ready to put behind him. (At a later meeting at the governor's mansion, on

Nov. 18, First Lady Kathy Evers joked that the governor was more excited that day for the 50th birthday of his beloved Egg McMuffin than he had been for his own birthday earlier in the month.)

Throughout the trip, regardless of campaign stop, line of questioning or Aaron Rodgers' vaccination status, Wisconsin's supposed sleepy governor had an air of quiet determinism. Evers describes himself as "tactile," and being back on the campaign trail seemed to do the trick. At each stop, a few dozen supporters at a time, he stumped, shook hands and posed for photos — all with an energy not often seen from the governor inside the walls of the Capitol.

In between stops he took hours of questions from the Cap Times while also putting out fires about birthday gifts. He doubled down on — and later fulfilled — his pledge to veto gerrymandered voting maps; he vowed to ensure the security of Wisconsin's elections; he bashed Republican lawmakers for their seeming unwillingness to work with him on issues they both want to tackle; and he told stories about how Kathy schools him in pickleball on the driveway of the governor's mansion.

He did it all with careful consideration, mulling his words before answering each of the paper's dozens of questions. The state's soft-spoken leader may not always have the most to say, but when he does speak, people seem to listen.

Tony Evers is running for reelection. Is he ready for the fight?

[...]

Then came March 2020 and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic — perhaps the worst crisis in state history.

During its height, one in seven Wisconsinites was unemployed, with many waiting weeks or months for the state's overwhelmed unemployment system to process their request for help (the backlog was so severe it eventually led to the resignation of an Evers cabinet secretary). Hospitals became inundated with COVID-19 patients, straining intensive care units across the state and leading to the construction of a field hospital at Wisconsin State Fair Park. And, of course, the worst scar of the pandemic: More than 8,900 confirmed deaths have been tied to the virus in Wisconsin since the disease gripped the country.

All the while, Evers said, his efforts to contain the virus in Wisconsin were

hamstrung when Republican lawmakers sued his administration over the state's stay-at-home order and mask mandate. Both orders were struck down by the state Supreme Court, leaving municipalities on their own to implement restrictions and much of the state open as if the virus weren't raging.

GOP lawmakers, though, insisted their lawsuits were only to prevent executive overreach. In an April 2020 statement, Assembly Speaker Robin Vos and then-Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald — who now serves in the U.S. House — said they had no option but to sue “to rein in this obvious abuse of power.”

They had even stronger words in their legal filing: “Purporting to act under color of State law, an unelected, unconfirmed cabinet secretary has laid claim to a suite of czar-like powers — unlimited in scope and indefinite in duration — over the people of Wisconsin,” the lawmakers wrote of Andrea Palm, who led the Department of Health Services through the early months of the pandemic.

“Per her decree, everyone in the State must stay home and most businesses must remain shuttered (with exceptions for activities and companies arbitrarily deemed ‘essential’),” the lawmakers wrote.

In the lawsuit, they also argued the administration's orders were unnecessary because the “Legislature is ready, willing and able to work with DHS and at the same time craft legislation (which it is drafting even now) to respond to the pandemic in a comprehensive and balanced fashion and guided by federal recommendations.”

No such legislation ever materialized.

Evers recalls those weeks and months as being “weighty,” telling the Cap Times that the political jostling that occurred was “God-awful.” He said he worked every day to keep Wisconsinites safe from the disease, and insisted more lives could have been saved had mitigation measures been left in place.

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The governor pushed on. And over the last year, Evers and legislative Republicans have continued to butt heads — including on issues, the governor said, they both want to work on.

“Some of the stuff we asked for (in the budget) is imminently possible,” Evers told

the Cap Times shortly before arriving at the headquarters of the Waukesha County Democratic Party. “We have the money for more broadband. We have the money for fixing roads faster. We have the money for better resources for schools. The rainy day fund is as high as it’s ever been. When are we going to have a worse rainy day than right now, during the pandemic?”

Republican lawmakers have resisted tapping into the state’s budget surplus, he said, because “they don’t want to give Evers a win.”

“So we’ve gone around them when we could,” he said. “We’ve done everything in our power to make a difference. But that’s why there’s a lot of unfinished business. And that’s why I’m running.”

[...]

He said between stops in Madison and Waukesha that he was elected governor by running on basic issues. This time won’t be any different.

“There are some basic issues that transcend Robin Vos and Tony Evers,” the governor said of the Assembly speaker and his political adversary. “It is roads, health care and education. Democratic moms and dads and Republican moms and dads, they want pretty much the same thing.”

Evers stuck to his script. At stops in Madison, Waukesha and Milwaukee he pushed his message about expanding access to broadband and high-speed internet in the state; he stumped for increased education spending; and he reminded voters again and again that it was time to “fix the damn roads.”

Information about the same issues was distributed by volunteers from the Democratic Party of Wisconsin while they canvassed after each of the governor’s stops.

“GOVERNOR EVERS DELIVERS,” declared the pamphlets, before going on to discuss the governor’s pandemic recovery plan.

But unlike 2018, when he raised eyebrows in Wisconsin and nationally by defeating then-Gov. Scott Walker, Evers has a new campaign pillar: “Defending our democracy,” as the leaflet describes it.

“Without a doubt, I never in my wildest dreams believed that I’d be using the veto

pen to make sure democracy still thrives,” Evers said. “If you think about the things that Republicans are asking us to change (related to elections), they’re the ones that put them in place. This isn’t something that was dreamt up by liberals, it was a system put together by Republicans four or five years ago when they were in total power.”

“I would have never guessed that there would be this weird and, frankly, dangerous attack on our democracy, especially as it relates to people’s right to vote,” Evers said.

[...]

“Bring it on,” Evers said in response to questions about a debate on education next fall.

“Do we need to have better achievement? Yes,” he said. “I think we have good achievement, but I think it can be better. Do schools need more resources? Yes. But if the major complaint is about not listening to parents ... bring it on. Parents are listened to in all sorts of ways.”

He also punched back against Republicans’ assertion that he didn’t do enough for students during the pandemic.

“(Republicans) are for local control until they don’t want local control — and it’s not just public schools that that applies to,” he said. “But the fact of the matter is (legislators) weren’t in session for 300 freakin’ days. They did nothing. They did absolutely nothing. And our local school boards were doing the best they could under the circumstances.”

“They should be thanking those local school boards for what they’ve been able to do,” Evers said, not trying to override them.

Despite the apparent challenges facing Democrats, the governor’s senior campaign staff remain unfazed about Evers’ reelection next fall. In a joint interview with the Cap Times, Cassi Fenili, the governor’s campaign manager, and Sam Roecker, his campaign communications director, pointed to the governor’s Wisconsin-first focus as the foundation of his reelection strategy.

[...]

“I’ll veto that in my sleep,” he told one enthusiastic supporter in Waukesha about GOP lawmakers’ redistricting plan, with his feisty language continuing a few minutes later while delivering remarks to supporters.

“The most important thing that happened last week was in Mequon-Thiensville School District,” he said to applause. “The kids of Mequon-Thiensville won. Democracy won,”

And, he added: “Rebecca Kleefisch lost.”

Evers was referencing a failed effort to recall four members of the school board in Mequon-Thiensville — an effort championed by former Lt. Gov. Rebecca Kleefisch.

Kleefisch, the current front-runner among Republicans to challenge Evers in the fall, was all in on the recall effort, boasting on social media about how her campaign volunteers were fighting for the cause. She even seemed to be present in the area on Election Day, posing for photos with recall supporters and urging people to go vote.

The governor had other strong words about his potential Republican challenger. In the car in between stops, he called the failed recall effort “an embarrassment for the former lieutenant governor.”

“She has staked out a far-right radical viewpoint, that’s for sure,” he said of Kleefisch. “She says she’s more conservative than Scott Walker — that should tell you something.”

He went on: “She’s become this kind of Donald Trump acolyte that wants to make it more difficult for people to vote.”

“She’s staking out a far-right position, and I don’t think Wisconsinites live in that world,” Evers said.

[...]

The jabs will continue.

Throughout multiple conversations, Evers had a tone that one wouldn’t call bland. Instead, he had the attitude of a political fighter — one that won’t be pinned into a corner — and insisted that he’s ready for next year’s race.

“Absolutely I’m ready to run,” he said. “I’m already running, frankly. We have a good record so I am looking forward to whatever they put up against me. ... I feel very confident in winning this race. So let the Republicans fight during their primary. I’m ready for them, whoever comes out of it.”

When asked again if he’s up to the task of reelection, he had a simple answer:

“Hell yes.”