

Evers campaign: Rebecca Kleefisch's missing COVID-19 plan

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MADISON, Wis. — Yesterday, the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel [highlighted](#) Rebecca Kleefisch's refusal to come up with a serious plan for responding to one of the biggest challenges facing Wisconsin in state history.

Kleefisch has continually spread misinformation about Gov. Tony Evers' pandemic response and embraced dangerous anti-mask and anti-vaccine rhetoric that puts Wisconsinites at risk and jeopardizes our economic recovery. While Kleefisch and state Republicans refuse to take COVID-19 seriously, Gov. Evers is working on getting more Wisconsinites vaccinated and supporting our small businesses as they bounce back from the pandemic.

Between August 20 and September 19, over [142,000 Wisconsinites](#) got their first dose of the vaccine and received a \$100 gift card thanks to Gov. Evers' vaccine incentive program. Gov. Evers has also allocated hundreds of millions of dollars towards supporting Wisconsin's [farmers](#), [small businesses](#), and [disadvantaged communities](#).

“The facts are clear: Governor Evers continues to steadily and safely lead Wisconsin through one of the most challenging crises in state history,” said **Tony for Wisconsin Communications Director Sam Roecker**. “Rebecca Kleefisch's refusal to tell Wisconsinites how she would keep families healthy and support our economic recovery should be disqualifying. Wisconsinites expect leadership, not someone who would rather ignore the big challenges facing our state.”

Read more about Kleefisch's refusal to come up with a serious pandemic response plan below.

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel: [Rebecca Kleefisch won't mandate vaccines or masks but has yet to release plan to navigate COVID-19 as governor](#)

Republican candidate for governor Rebecca Kleefisch has yet to release a plan to combat a contagious virus that has killed more than 8,000 Wisconsin residents, exhausted health care workers, and continues to batter Wisconsin's service industry.

Kleefisch, Wisconsin's former lieutenant governor, is instead offering strategies she does not want to deploy during the coronavirus pandemic if she is elected governor in 2022 and the COVID-19 outbreak persists, like mandates for vaccines and face masks.

"First and foremost, I would trust people. And I would not politicize or stoke fear, like we have seen done in this administration," Kleefisch said in a recent interview.

"Using the bully pulpit of the governor's office, you can choose — do you want to encourage people to do certain healthy behaviors? Or do you want to scare people, and then after they are not scared enough, determine that the government ought to mandate what type of health care procedures they get? To me that's not trusting adults to do their own adulting."

A spokesman did not clarify which of Gov. Tony Evers' actions Kleefisch was referring to as scaring people.

[...]

Kleefisch has not engaged in public promotion of vaccinations or wearing face masks, instead saying choosing to get vaccinated or wear masks is a decision between a person and their doctor. She did not answer whether she would participate in a robust public education campaign to encourage vaccinations like one filmed by former Gov. Scott Walker, with whom Kleefisch served as lieutenant governor.

Kleefisch has made few social media posts regarding vaccines. One in December shared which vaccines used an abortion-derived cell line in their development, for example, and in January and March, she criticized Evers' vaccine rollout and the delayed classification of nearly 1,000 nursing home deaths.

Kleefisch said the public could have had more information about their risk of death

if it was known sooner that 45% of COVID-19 deaths at the time were in nursing homes.

In August, Kleefisch released a plan for the state as the president of the 1848 Project, a group she launched last year as she made plans for her run. The agenda did not offer a plan for fighting the coronavirus pandemic but said the state should not force churches to close while allowing grocery stores or other businesses to remain open.

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“We need to encourage people to do the things that we know have an efficient result for COVID mitigation — some of the basic things like hand-washing and staying some distance apart. And one of the things that we don’t like to do as Americans, but we need to do more of, is staying home when we are sick.”

Sam Roecker, spokesman for Evers’ campaign, said Kleefisch should have a detailed plan to navigate the pandemic by now.

“Failing to have a serious plan to combat COVID-19 and continuing to ignore health care professionals should be disqualifying for anyone running for public office,” Roecker said. “Rebecca Kleefisch has had months to think about what she would do in this position, but even her best attempt is incoherent and ignores our best tools for putting the pandemic behind us.”

In an interview on WISN’s “UpFront” Sunday political news show, Kleefisch said if she had been governor during March 2020 when the pandemic first hit Wisconsin she would have consulted the state’s emergency response plan, which outlines goals for state officials during emergencies and how to accomplish them using state resources.

Kleefisch in the Sept. 13 interview said “we saw none of that” in Evers’ response. But a spokesman for Wisconsin Emergency Management said Evers did use the plan as a guide for his response.

Spokesman Andrew Beckett said the plan “helped the state identify the players’ roles, lead agencies, and functions when setting up the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.”

A spokesman for Kleefisch did not answer how her use of the emergency response

plan would be different than Evers' or which health leaders Kleefisch would tap or model in crafting a COVID-19 plan.

When asked how she would prevent hospitals from becoming overwhelmed in the event of a new surge of infections, Kleefisch told the Journal Sentinel it's appropriate to rely on measures like hand-washing and physical distancing, and choosing to wear masks or getting vaccinated.

"We know that hospitals only have a certain amount of beds because they have to run on business efficiency. And so they are not designed to have thousands of empty beds on a daily basis. And so when you have a health care pandemic, you can most certainly expect that there are going to be more people in the hospital than on any typical day," Kleefisch said.

"But now that we have learned that we're going to have health care workers shortage in the event of the hospital system having more cases of COVID, I think the last thing we need to be doing is mandating vaccines because you're forcing workers to choose between a profession as a health care hero and their own autonomy as an individual and choosing not to let government mandate for them a health care choice that they don't believe is right for them," she said.

Kleefisch said she would sue over federal vaccine mandates if elected governor and seek to reverse statewide COVID-19 vaccine mandates, if any were enacted into law.

But she said she supports current requirements in state law to vaccinate children against various infectious diseases.

"The vaccine mandates that are in state law right now have been in state law for a very good long time and have exceptions to them. There are a lot of cases today of people who are concerned about taking the COVID vaccine because there hasn't been long-term testing done," Kleefisch said.

"The (measles, mumps and rubella) vaccine has been around as long as I can possibly remember. I got it when I was a kid — both of my kids have gotten it. And so I understand the folks who say gosh, there's just not enough data on it for me to know that this is the same exact thing as an MMR shot."

Evers released a plan to navigate the pandemic in the spring of 2020, which

included ordering restrictions on gatherings that closed businesses not deemed “essential” and outlined a gradual reopening process. The order was struck down in May 2020 by the Wisconsin Supreme Court in a lawsuit brought by Republican lawmakers. Later, Evers issued orders mandating face masks indoors and capacity limits but judges ruled that the measures were illegal because the Legislature did not approve the mitigation efforts.

The Evers administration also coordinated the state’s vaccine distribution that began as a confusing process but improved to be one of the most efficient in the nation at one point. Evers’ top health officials have held regular media briefings to answer questions throughout the pandemic, which have fluctuated in frequency over the course of the pandemic.

He utilized Wisconsin National Guard members to create mass testing and vaccination centers, and built a field hospital near Milwaukee to provide relief to stressed hospitals that went largely unused until it was shuttered earlier this year.

The governor also has overseen the distribution of billions in federal pandemic relief funding to businesses, schools and local governments.

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