

GOP's Lt. gov field wide open heading into 2022 cycle

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As the 2021 state GOP convention kicks off in the Wisconsin Dells, at least a half-dozen Republicans are considering a bid for lieutenant governor next year, including three GOP state lawmakers, sources tell WisPolitics.com.

State Sen. Rob Stafsholt, R-New Richmond, told WisPolitics.com people started reaching out to him recently to encourage him to consider a run. He noted former Lt. Gov. Rebecca Kleefisch is expected to run for gov and is from southeastern Wisconsin. He said if she's the nominee, having someone from northwestern Wisconsin with a background in rural issues would make a well-rounded ticket. Stafsholt is not up for reelection for his Senate seat until 2024.

"I'm nowhere near making a decision in that regard," Stafsholt said. "I'm honored that those people thought enough about me to make those phone calls and encouraged me to run."

State Rep. Scott Allen, R-Waukesha, told WisPolitics.com he'd like to make a decision on a possible Lt. gov run by November.

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"It's been clear that I've looked at opportunities that come up when they do come up to see if that's the right thing for me to do," Allen said.

Sources also said state Sen. Pat Testin, R-Stevens Point, is considering a run. He won reelection in 2020 to his north-central Wisconsin Senate seat with 56.4 percent of the vote after pulling an upset win in 2016.

Sources said others considering bids include:

*entrepreneur Matt Cordio, who founded Startup Wisconsin, which helps advance and develop tech and startups.

*Ben Voelkel, who until recently served as an aide to U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson, R-Oshkosh. Voelkel considered a run for the 5th CD last year before ultimately passing on it. Sources indicated Voelkel has been talking to people about a bid and has taken steps such as beginning to look at organizing a campaign.

*Cindy Werner, who ran unsuccessfully for the 4th CD in 2020, losing the GOP primary by 87 votes out of 13,324 cast.

So far, no one has registered with the state Elections Commission to run for the seat. The primary will be separate from the race for the GOP nomination for gov.

On the gov side, three Republicans had registered with the Elections Commission: Jonathan Wichmann, of Franklin, who had declared he would run if there had been a successful petition drive to recall Gov. Tony Evers; Leonard Edward Larson Jr., of Menomonie; and James Kellen, of Burlington.

Besides registering, candidates must collect 2,000 valid signatures to qualify for the ballot.