

Loudenbeck formally announces bid for secretary of state

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GOP state Rep. Amy Loudenbeck today formally launched her bid for secretary of state, saying she would seek to modernize the office, be more active with the few responsibilities it has and seek to serve as a check on the Wisconsin Elections Commission.

In the wake of the 2020 election, some Republicans have called for again having the secretary of state's office oversee the administration of elections, a power that was stripped from the office in 1974.

Loudenbeck told WisPolitics.com in an interview it would be up to the Legislature if it wanted to again put the office fully in charge of election administration. Still, she suggested the secretary of state's office could have an expanded role such as being added to the six-member Wisconsin Elections Commission, which is now evenly split between Dem and GOP appointees. She also said the office could take on other election-related duties such as managing voter rolls.

Former President Trump has raised a series of false claims about the 2020 Wisconsin election results. The nonpartisan Legislative Audit Bureau this fall found there was no widespread fraud in the election, though it recommended changes in election procedures.

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Loudenbeck said she doesn't believe the Wisconsin election was stolen, but had concerns over the private money that local governments used to cover the costs of administering it. The bulk of that money went to the state's five largest cities and is one of the subjects former Supreme Court Justice Michael Gableman is reviewing as part of his look at the 2020 election.

“That’s a real issue right now,” Loudenbeck said of voters who lack confidence in the results. “I am very aware that this is something we need to address, but I am not running on the premise that there was widespread fraud in the election or the results should be overturned.”

So far, three other Republicans have filed to run for the office, including Jay Schroeder, of Neenah. He took 47.2 percent of the vote in 2018 as Dem Doug La Follette won his 11th four-year term.

La Follette told WisPolitics.com earlier this week he will make a decision about running for a 12th term this spring, but expected to run.

The other two Republicans to file are Justin Schmidtka, a former Marine from Green Bay, and Dmitry Becker, a member of the National Guard from New Berlin.

Schroeder, Schmidtka and Becker have all called for the office to again oversee election administration.

The duties of the secretary of state’s office have been pared back dramatically for years. It currently has two employees beyond La Follette, and one of its few responsibilities includes serving on the Board of Commissioners of Public Lands. That board, which includes the secretary of state, attorney general and state treasurer, manages a \$1.3 billion trust fund and 77,000 acres of state lands.

Loudenbeck said she would seek to be more active with the board and modernize the secretary of state’s office. As an example, she cited allowing businesses to file documents electronically with the office rather than printing off paper copies from the website and submitting them.

“For 45 years we’ve had a person in that office collecting a state salary and taxpayers have nothing to show for it except for an empty office with his name on the door,” she said.