

Republican Owens drops out of AG race

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Republican Ryan Owens, who has faced criticism in recent weeks over his past comments, dropped out of the race for attorney general today, saying the attacks have taken a toll on his family.

Today's decision comes on the heels of UW-Madison reposting three of the four podcasts Owens taped while director of the university's Tommy G. Thompson Center. That includes one in which he suggested that releasing the readout of former President Trump's conversation with the Ukraine president could be "political suicide."

He's also faced criticism from some conservatives for positive comments he made about Gov. Tony Evers' actions early in the COVID-19 pandemic.

Owens, who was making his first bid for office, said in a statement that he hadn't anticipated how the attacks would affect his family. One of Owens' sons is autistic and the UW-Madison professor said he has been taking the attacks particularly hard.

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"The last few weeks have shown me that politics is even more disgusting than I expected," Owens said.

Owens said he "strenuously" disagreed with the attacks, but he was not willing to put his family through "any more character assassinations."

Owens' decision leaves Fond du Lac DA Eric Toney as the only announced Republican in the race to take on Dem AG Josh Kaul next year.

Owens made a splash with his campaign, raising \$308,741 between April 19 and June 30 while securing a string of high-profile GOP endorsements. That was more than seven times what Toney raised even though the district attorney got into the race a couple of weeks earlier. Toney also has faced criticism from conservatives for filing and then dropping charges for violations of Evers' stay-at-home order during the early stages of the pandemic.

Still, Owens also faced a series of questions about his lack of prosecutorial experience and how it would measure up against Kaul in a theoretical general election matchup.

In a Twitter thread, Toney praised Owens for helping “focus the debate on what matters — fighting crime and putting violent criminals in prison for a very long time.”

“We need to balance law-and-order with a firm adherence to the rule of law and deferring to the Legislature as the legitimate policymaking body for our state,” Toney tweeted. “We can’t live in a state where bureaucrats and activists judges run wild with law.”

Kaul said in a statement, “While Ryan Owens and I disagree on many of the issues, he ran an energetic campaign, and I thank him for his interest in serving Wisconsinites and for participating in the electoral process. I wish him well in the future.”