

‘UpFront’: School board association leader calls for civility after threats, disruption at local board meetings

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The executive director of the Wisconsin Association of School Boards says he has become alarmed over recent threats and harassment of local school board members.

In an interview aired Sunday on “UpFront,” John Ashley said he put out a call for civility at local board meetings after recent examples of what he said was the public being disrespectful and disruptive. The program is produced in partnership with WisPolitics.com.

“What I was concerned about is we were seeing more examples of school board meetings being disrupted by members of the public who were not willing to allow the discussion to go forward, that were making threats, that were using obscenities,” Ashley said. “That’s not what we need at our school board meetings.”

Ashley didn’t offer specifics but said he was aware of threats against school board members, board members being followed, or having their homes chalked.

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“You have every right to disagree with a position that your board might take, but you have no right to be disruptive and to be putting people’s families at risk,” Ashley said.

In another segment, Republican candidate for attorney general Ryan Owens promised to “make crime criminal again” and restore “common sense” at the Department of Justice.

“We’ve got real problems right now in this state, and I think we need real solutions and real leaders to address them,” said Owens, who teaches at UW-Madison.

Owens said Democratic incumbent Josh Kaul has “not taken our safety seriously, he has not taken our freedoms seriously.”

“UpFront” host Adrienne Pedersen asked Owens what about his experience qualifies him to be attorney general. Owens is an attorney and college professor who has never served as a state or federal prosecutor.

“I’ve got a slightly different background than many candidates do, but it’s precisely right for the moment that we’re in right now. We’re looking for somebody who is not a professional politician, we want an outsider to come in and shake things up and get the job done,” Owens said.

Also on the program, WisPolitics.com Editor JR Ross said that after Madison lobbyist Bill McCoshen took a pass on running for governor, he is watching to see what two other Republicans do — state Rep. John Macco of the Green Bay area and former U.S. Senate candidate Kevin Nicholson.

Macco has pledged to match \$250,000 if he can raise it from supporters, but Ross said there are questions as to whether he can catch up to former Republican Lt. Gov. Rebeca Kleefisch, who announced that she raised \$1.2 million from individual donors in the first 48 hours after formally announcing her candidacy.

Nicholson, who ran for Senate in 2018 and lost the primary, has been traveling the state with No Better Friend, his non-profit conservative advocacy group. Ross said Nicholson has started a \$1.5 million ad campaign to promote the group and himself. Ross said insiders don’t think it’s a coincidence that Nicholson launched the promotion around the time Kleefisch confirmed her candidacy.

More than a dozen people have filed campaign registration statements for governor with the Wisconsin Elections Commission, but Democratic Gov. Tony Evers and Kleefisch are the biggest names in the race so far.

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