

Barnes campaign: WI Columnist - “Mandela Barnes consolidates support, builds a winning coalition”

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Top Wisconsin Political Columnist Dan Schafer: *"That's the word that comes up most often when you talk to Barnes supporters – coalition."*

MADISON — Following last week's endorsements from Tom Nelson, Alex Lasry, and Sarah Godlewski, a [new report](#) from top Wisconsin political columnist Dan Schafer details the work Lt. Governor Mandela Barnes has done to consolidate the Democratic Party by connecting with Wisconsinites and building a coalition across the state.

Key Points:

- But first let's not overlook Barnes' remarkable ability to consolidate support in this race.
- He is demonstrating that he can build a broad coalition.
- That's the word that comes up most often when you talk to Barnes supporters – coalition.
- This burgeoning coalition will be tested, no doubt, but this is how the big tent of the Democratic Party in a swing state like Wisconsin can and should build lasting political might – by forming a real coalition to compete for the long haul.

The Recombobulation Area: Mandela Barnes builds a winning coalition, consolidating support in a wild ending to Wisconsin's Senate primary

For months, the race in the Democratic primary for U.S. Senate was a fairly quiet one. But then, in a flurry of activity last week, the race completely changed.

To recap: On Monday, Outagamie County Executive Tom Nelson dropped out of the race. On Wednesday, Alex Lasry did the same. On Friday, State Treasurer Sarah Godlewski followed suit, with all three endorsing the frontrunner, Lt. Gov. Mandela Barnes. It was a stunning turn of events, and with 10 days to go before the primary, the race was settled. Mandela Barnes is going to be the Democratic nominee to take on Sen. Ron Johnson in the general election this fall.

[...]

Speaking with [reporters after the debate](#), State Treasurer Sarah Godlewski said, "In this race, what it comes down to is we should be focused on Ron Johnson, not on each other."

Throughout the campaign, there hadn't even been many policy fissures between the candidates. They've all been generally aligned on top issues – fighting inflation, codifying Roe, enacting common sense gun reform, expanding access to health care, raising the minimum wage, reviving the Child Tax Credit, combating climate change, supporting pro-union, "Made in America" policies, expanding voting rights, getting rid of the filibuster to get all of this done, and so on.

[...]

Perhaps then the events of last week were less of a tectonic shift in the race and more of an acknowledgement of a reality that's been there for quite some time.

Barnes has always been the favorite to win this race. He started as the frontrunner, built a broad coalition, and delivered a strong campaign. He was on his way to a clear victory – possibly even with an outright majority and not merely a plurality – before the other candidates began dropping out. Asking sources about the primary, even as Lasry was surging, people would say it was still "Barnes' race to lose." He didn't lose.

In the end, Nelson, Lasry and Godlewski each chose to unite behind Barnes rather than spend the final stretch battling increasingly long odds to try to defeat him. Part of this is a recognition of where the race was heading where, based on the latest polling, Barnes was starting to pull away from the pack as undecided voters began to break. But another part of this is the recognition of the larger stakes of the looming general election race against Ron Johnson and the need to be united against Wisconsin's senior Senator, who, at the moment, is the favorite among forecasters to win re-election (as most Republicans in toss-up states are in this midterm year).

[...]

Now, with the nomination essentially clinched for Barnes, he and Democrats can use these days before the partisan primary to present a united front against Johnson instead of turning on one another. Just take a look at what's happening with the gubernatorial primary across the aisle to see what Democrats – already combatting the typical midterm disadvantage – might want to avoid in this race.

Over the next few months, there will be no shortage of opportunities to further examine Barnes' candidacy and his quest to become Wisconsin's first Black senator. As focus shifts to this fall's general election, this is a race that will surely attract a great deal of national attention, and there are many valid questions that will be worth asking.

But first let's not overlook Barnes' remarkable ability to consolidate support in this race. He gained endorsements from national figures from Sen. Elizabeth Warren and Sen. Bernie Sanders to Rep. James Clyburn to former Lt. Col. Alexander Vindman to Sen. Cory Booker. He lapped the field in [local level endorsements](#), who come from a wide range of backgrounds. He is demonstrating that he can build a broad coalition.

That's the word that comes up most often when you talk to Barnes supporters – coalition.

This burgeoning coalition will be tested, no doubt, but this is how the big tent of the Democratic Party in a swing state like Wisconsin can and should build lasting political might – by forming a real coalition to compete for the long haul. The goal for Democrats can't just be to topple the "villain" candidate in each election cycle – Walker in '18, Trump in '20, Johnson in '22 – they have to be building a long-term political movement to achieve sustained success. Perhaps activating a broader coalition that includes progressive and moderates and everyone in between can do just that.

[...]

The bottom line, after all of the upheaval in this race over the past week, is this: The Democratic Party unifying in this moment is a very good thing. This alignment is going to be to their advantage. This full embrace of Barnes is going to improve his chances to win an upset victory over Ron Johnson this fall.

We'll find out in about 100 days if Mandela Barnes can make history in Wisconsin. Buckle up.