STATE AFFAIRS
WISPOLITICS
Wisconsin's Premier Political News Service

Nelson Campaign: ICYMI: "…(S)ometimes the little guy wins, sometimes the underdog wins."

Posted on Thursday, Jan 20, 2022

>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. Get the app or access via desktop.

Appleton, Wis. – Grassroots populist and Outagamie County Executive Tom Nelson's underdog campaign – and his path to victory in the U.S. Senate Democratic primary – was profiled in the Wisconsin Examiner.

Veteran journalist Ruth Conniff dives deep into Nelson's "old-fashioned legwork and grassroots campaign" and notes the independent progressive profile that makes him an attractive statewide candidate in a crowded Democratic field looking to unseat incumbent extremist Sen. Ron Johnson (R-Wis.).

The profile highlights Nelson's accomplishments in the legislature, his longshot but ultimately successful efforts to help a century-old paper mill, and his belief in a new labor movement that's emerging as a result of the COVID-19 Crisis.

Read more about Nelson's grassroots campaign below.

Wisconsin Examiner: The Underdog: Tom Nelson's longshot race for U.S. Senate

Republican Sen. Ron Johnson's announcement that he is running for a third term hardly came as a surprise to state Democrats, who have already been campaigning against the senator for months. None of them has been at it longer than Tom Nelson. The Outagamie County executive launched his campaign 15 months ago, attempting an old-fashioned legwork and grassroots campaign in the age of COVID-19.

"This is a classic populist, grassroots campaign that Wisconsinites love — like Bill Proxmire, like Russ Feingold," Nelson says.

A recent social media campaign ad, filmed in Nelson's garage, is an homage to former U.S. Sen. Russ Feingold's successful 1992 little-guy campaign, in which Feingold ran on a "garage door pledge" posted on the garage door of his ranch-style house in Middleton. That was when Feingold first ran and won the seat Johnson later captured from him. In Nelson's ad, he is holding a garage sale to finance his run for the U.S. Senate selling, among other items, a book by Feingold.

Nelson, who served for six years in the state Assembly, including as Democratic majority leader in the 2009-10 session, is vocally pro-labor and represents working class constituents in a district that voted for Trump twice.

[…]

Nelson says he sees an advantage in being the underdog. "What I like about my three [primary] opponents is they all think that they are the leader," he says. "So they're having these very conservative like-a-general-election campaigns. I know that I'm not leading, alright. I know that I'm a county executive with 25% name recognition. So I get to run the campaign that I want to run. I'm not gonna owe anybody anything. So I'm talking about the issues I'm passionate about."

Among the issues Nelson is most passionate about is labor. As he was launching his Senate campaign, he wrote a book, "One Day Stronger," about the battle to save an Appleton paper mill and how union workers were central to the effort to rescue it from being shut down. It's a story, he told the Examiner's Erik Gunn, that shows "sometimes the little guy, sometimes the underdog wins."

[…]

… Johnson hasn't supported Wisconsin manufacturing, Nelson says. He recalls a meeting with Johnson, who visited Outagamie County a couple of years ago, when Nelson was involved in the fight to save the Appleton Coated paper mill. "Our mantra and our mission in my office is, 'We help people,' " Johnson told the group.

Nelson says he raised his hand and asked whether Johnson would help save Wisconsin's struggling paper mills. "And he said, 'Well, you know, paper mills are kind of like the buggy whip — 100 years ago the government wasn't bailing them out,' " Nelson says. Johnson wasn't interested in helping.

[…]