

Bipartisan group No Labels eyes third-party ticket, working to secure ballot access in Wisconsin, other states

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No Labels, the bipartisan group eyeing a third-party presidential ticket, is working to secure ballot access in states including Wisconsin.

“Our goal is to be on probably a little less than half the states by the end of the year,” No Labels National Director Joe Cunningham said on WISN’s “UpFront,” which is produced in partnership with WisPolitics.com. “This is a long process, a tedious process.”

Dem U.S. Sen. Joe Manchin and former GOP Gov. Jon Huntsman will headline a No Labels event in New Hampshire today, increasing speculation about the third-party ticket.

Cunningham, a former Dem congressman, said the most likely scenario under which the group would launch a third-party bid is a Trump-Biden rematch.

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“Everyone is scratching their heads looking at these two presumptive nominees thinking to themselves, ‘Is this the best we’ve got?’” Cunningham said. “We’re four years later, and we’re back to square one with the same exact two people?”

Former U.S. Senate candidate Mandela Barnes told “UpFront” he isn’t ruling out a future political run but will remain on the sidelines for now, working to increase voter turnout and bolstering new Dem candidates ahead of 2024.

"It's certainly not a 'No,'" Barnes said. "The door isn't closed, but I have no plans to run for office at this moment."

When asked whether he would consider another U.S. Senate bid, the U.S. House or governor, Barnes said, "We'll see what happens when the time comes."

Barnes lost to GOP Sen. Ron Johnson in November by fewer than 27,000 votes and is now president of Power to the Polls Wisconsin and heads The Long Run PAC.

Barnes' PAC recently made its first round of endorsements, including Sen. Tammy Baldwin, Rep. Colin Allred running for Senate in Texas and Rep. Ruben Gallego running for Senate in Arizona.

"It's not necessarily an ideological PAC," Barnes said. "This is about competitiveness of the district or the state, and it's about what these candidates can bring to the table to change the face of politics, to ultimately change the game, to bring a much-needed perspective to our politics that's missing."

Reflecting on his 2022 loss, Barnes said, "There are a lot of reasons why people decide to or not show up, and I always say you can't blame voters for their decisions they make, and that's true in my own race."

"Anytime you come that close, there are a whole bunch of what-ifs," Barnes said. "In my case, 26,000 what-ifs, but it's not about looking backwards. It's about looking forward."

Tim Sheehy, president of the Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce, says Wisconsin companies are fully embracing diversity, equity and inclusion efforts despite GOP lawmakers criticizing and defunding programs in the city of Milwaukee and within the UW System.

"I think Republicans should let the UW System and the city address those issues as they see fit," Sheehy said on "UpFront." "And I don't think it's an area where I think the Legislature needs to be putting its fingers either into the UW System, quite frankly, or the city or private employers."

Sheehy said the MMAC's Region of Choice Initiative involves 125 employers representing 120,000 employees working to increase DEI efforts. The group set benchmarks to increase the number of Black and brown management talent by 25 percent within a five-year span and to increase overall Black and brown talent by 15

percent.

Sheehy said collectively, employers have already within three years increased management diversity by 26 percent and 12 percent among overall talent.

“I think it’s a misunderstanding or a misuse of diversity, equity and inclusion that causes people to challenge it,” Sheehy said. “For most employers, this is a strategy to make their workplace more hospitable and allow them to recruit a more diverse population to their workforce.”

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