

# WisDems: ABC News on the impending “Messy” “Civil War” GOP Senate Primary in Wisconsin

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**MADISON, Wis.** — New reporting from [ABC News](#) today detailed how Wisconsin Republicans are gearing up for their coming “[Civil War](#)” primary between two megamillionaires—Eric Hovde and Scott Mayer. The two ultra-wealthy politicians are preparing to spend upwards of \$30 million, with millions more from Hovde’s DC allies and Mayer’s courting of the [Uihleins](#).

Mayer told ABC News that he doesn’t anticipate the primary between him and Hovde remaining civil.

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**ABC News: [Wisconsin Republicans want to beat Sen. Tammy Baldwin and hope a messy primary doesn’t stop them](#)**

By: Tal Axelrod

- Republicans in Wisconsin say they are nervously eyeing whether the party’s upcoming Senate primary will remain civil — or morph into another messy, high-stakes battle.
- Conservative strategists and experts who spoke with ABC News warned that how many people end up running — and how much blood is drawn in their fight for the nomination — could make a difference in how strongly the party performs in a key swing state when any one Senate race could determine control the chamber and the fate of things like Supreme Court nominations.

- There were also protracted Senate primary battles last year in Arizona, Pennsylvania and New Hampshire, where more mainstream and more MAGA candidates fought it out and the Trump-backed choices ultimately prevailed.
- Democrats went on to win in each state, underscoring how the Republican base sometimes struggles to pick candidates who can win over the general electorate.
- The Wisconsin GOP hasn't yet recruited any major candidate to take on Democratic Sen. Tammy Baldwin, but businessman Eric Hovde is laying the groundwork for a run and Scott Mayer, another businessman, is considering a campaign as well. **The potential remains for other hopefuls to announce, too.**
- Montana Sen. Steve Daines, the chair of Senate Republicans' campaign arm, already said Hovde "is gonna get in that race," and a source familiar with Hovde's thinking told ABC News that a formal announcement would likely come in the early part of 2024.
- **Mayer, meanwhile, told ABC News that he's met with potential donors like the Uihleins and that while he and [Hovde] have a cordial relationship, Hovde's decision wouldn't influence his own. (The Uihleins did not respond to a request for comment.)**
- **Mayer said, of Hovde: "I don't know that it can ever completely remain civil."**
- Hovde, a deep-pocketed banking and real estate entrepreneur who unsuccessfully ran for the Senate in 2012, is expected to have the backing of the National Republican Senatorial Committee, which has been exercising a far more muscular approach to primaries after adopting a largely hands-off strategy in nominating contests in 2022 — which, experts said, ultimately helped lead to more controversial nominees winning out before losing in the general election.
- Mayer, who runs a staffing company and whose personal wealth is also hefty but not thought to be as expansive as Hovde's, told ABC News that he would be willing to invest some of his own money in a campaign, too.

- One strategist predicted that if the primary really heats up, it could also become seriously expensive — “you gotta be ready to spend \$20, \$30 million.”
- The hypothetical matchup could mirror other headline-making primaries in 2024, including in West Virginia and potentially in Montana.
- Whomever wins the primary will be facing Baldwin, who has been able to win reelection in the narrowly divided state, at times by yawning margins.
- Even Republicans who spoke to ABC News conceded her electoral prowess, praising her policy focus, retail expertise in areas that aren’t necessarily friendly to Democrats and a dedicated constituent services department.
- “She is extremely organized. ... Her office is effective. And she translates that very savvily into an ability to connect out in rural Wisconsin in a way that isn’t all that remarkable, it’s just notable because of how little the Democrats are able to do that, usually,” said a Wisconsin GOP strategist who is familiar with some of the possible candidates’ thinking, who asked to be quoted anonymously to speak more candidly.
- Baldwin’s appeal across the state was underscored in 2018 when she won by almost 11%, even winning counties that voted for former President Donald Trump.