

Barnes campaign: theGrio: Mandela Barnes says this advice from Barack Obama is guiding his historic campaign for Wisconsin governor

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In a [new interview with theGrio](#), Mandela Barnes discussed his campaign for governor and the advice he got from Barack Obama after running for the Senate in 2022.

Reflecting on that very close race, Barnes said there are many “lessons learned” as he campaigns this time around. He even credits America’s first Black president, Barack Obama, for some sage advice that he is using as a guide on his path to the governorship.

“After my race for Senate...I got a call from Barack Obama. He talked about the race that he lost for Congress, [and] about the work that he put in afterwards, and that’s what I’ve been up to these past few years,” Barnes told theGrio.

Lt. Governor Barnes talked about getting back to organizing, the work he’s done to boost turnout in Milwaukee’s Black community, and why he’s running on issues like “increasing health care access” and “putting more money back in people’s pockets.”

theGrio: [Mandela Barnes says this advice from Barack Obama is guiding his historic campaign for Wisconsin governor](#)

[Gerren Keith Gaynor, 2/13/26]

- Mandela Barnes knows a thing or two about running a statewide election. The

Wisconsin Democrat, running to be the state's first Black governor in this year's gubernatorial election, previously served as lieutenant governor from 2019 to 2023.

- The 39-year-old Milwaukee native describes his “day one agenda” as focusing on increasing health care access, “putting more money in people’s pockets,” and closing “tax loopholes that allow the wealthy to get away without paying their fair share.”
- Reflecting on that very close race, Barnes said there are many “lessons learned” as he campaigns this time around. He even credits America’s first Black president, Barack Obama, for some sage advice that he is using as a guide on his path to the governorship.
- “After my race for Senate...I got a call from Barack Obama. He talked about the race that he lost for Congress, [and] about the work that he put in afterwards, and that’s what I’ve been up to these past few years,” Barnes told theGrio.
- After the 2022 election, the Democrat returned to his “roots” of organizing, becoming president of Power to Polls Wisconsin. Noticing a decline in voter participation, particularly among Black voters—a trend since Obama left office in 2012—Barnes said, “It was important to ensure that we reverse that trend, because at the rate we were going, there would never be another Democrat serving as president.”
- Barnes said Milwaukee, Wisconsin’s largest and most diverse city, became a major focus, engaging voters year-round.
- Barnes noted that Milwaukee had the highest voter turnout of the 50 largest U.S. cities. He credited that primarily to the majority-Black wards in Milwaukee that he and organizers focused on, asserting, “Milwaukee also had the least significant swing towards Donald Trump.”
- He continued, “It is important to not just have the courage and conviction to stand up to fight against Donald Trump when he is doing harm to the people of Wisconsin, but also leading with a vision that is not just counter to the president’s approach, but a vision to actually be able to offer opportunity where it seems like there is very little coming from the federal government.”
- Recalling his history-making moment as the state’s first Black lieutenant governor, Barnes said, “This is not about making history. It’s about making a difference.”
- He added, “It’s about bringing a unique perspective to the highest office in the state, using that perspective to benefit everybody in Wisconsin, to look at our challenges, not from the lens that has been used to divide communities, but

the lens that should be used to unite people in a way like never before.”