

Primary Election Winners Advance To Competitive Races This Fall

By Misha Lee, MHA Wisconsin Lobbyist

This month's primary election has determined the candidates that are up for election in less than three months. Below are the candidates running in major statewide races this fall. Also on the ballot this November are the state's eight congressional seats, all 99 state Assembly seats, and the 17 odd-numbered state Senate seats.

U.S. Senate – Senator Ron Johnson (incumbent/R) vs. Mandela Barnes (D)

Governor/Lt. Governor – Governor Tony Evers (incumbent) and Sara Rodriguez (D) vs. Tim Michels and Roger Roth (R)

Attorney General – Attorney General Josh Kaul (incumbent/D) vs. Eric Toney (R)

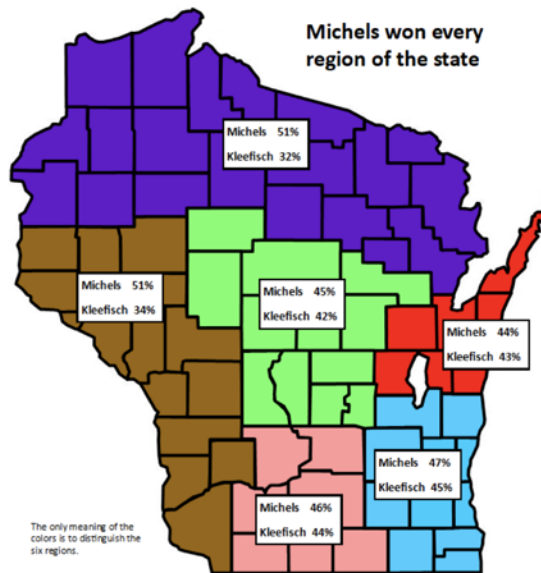
Secretary of State – Secretary of State Doug La Follette (incumbent/D) vs. Amy Loudenbeck (R)

State Treasurer - Aaron Richardson (D) vs. John Leiber (R)

With the largest state voter turnout for a partisan midterm primary election in almost 40 years, Republican gubernatorial candidate Tim Michels and Democrat U.S. Senate candidate Mandela Barnes both won their respective primary battles and advanced to the November general election. Each will face two strong incumbents running for reelection - Governor Tony Evers (D) and U.S. Senator Ron Johnson (R). How Michels and Barnes won their primary elections followed two very different paths, but the upcoming election will showcase two of the closest watched races in the nation. The Johnson-Barnes matchup, in particular, could very well determine which party controls the United States Senate for the second half of President Biden's first term in the White House. Outsider candidate Tim Michels will face off against incumbent Governor Tony Evers in a highly competitive race that will determine if Republicans control the Governor's office and Legislature or whether Democrats will still have a reliable veto under a Democrat governor.

Michels, who joined the four-way Republican Governor's race late and self-financed his campaign with \$12 million of his own money, won his primary with just over 47 percent of the vote. Former Lt. Governor Rebecca Kleefisch, who had campaigned for the nomination for the better part of a year and once had been considered the GOP frontrunner, received 42 percent. State Representative Tim Ramthun garnered 6 percent, Kevin Nicholson 3.6 percent and Adam Fisher received just 1.2 percent. Nicholson dropped out of the race several weeks before the election, but ballots had already been printed. Nicholson's withdrawal from the race likely helped catapult Michels to victory over Kleefisch since both Nicholson and Michels ran as anti-establishment, outsider candidates. Michels surprisingly dominated the race in all six regions of the state (see map) over Kleefisch who did not perform as well as she needed to, especially in the densely populated areas of southeastern Wisconsin and Milwaukee County. The Evers-Michels matchup is sure to be one of the more exciting statewide races to watch. In 2018,

Evers surprised a lot of people when he defeated incumbent Governor Scott Walker in a tight race that was decided by less than one percentage point.



In the race for the Democratic nomination for the U.S. Senate, Lt. Governor Mandela Barnes coasted to a successful win in his primary election that at one point had a total of 9 candidates running. Towards the final weeks of the election, multiple top tier candidates (Tom Nelson, Sara Godlewski, and Alex Lasry) all withdrew from the race and threw their endorsements to Barnes for the Democratic nomination. Barnes will take on incumbent Republican U.S. Senator Ron Johnson in a race that will see millions of dollars in outside money spent here since this seat could determine which party controls the U.S. Senate in the next Congress.

In the race for the Republican Attorney General nomination to see who will face incumbent Democrat Attorney General Josh Kaul, Fond du Lac County District Attorney narrowly defeated former State Representative Adam Jarchow by fewer than 4,000 votes. Karen Mueller, who ran as an outsider, came in third receiving 26 percent of the vote and likely cost Jarchow the nomination. Historically, the Attorney General's race tracks closely with the results of the Gubernatorial race with very few ticket splitters. This election is expected to be as close as the Evers-Michels contest.

As a reminder, according to state statutes on the primary election, the chairperson of the Wisconsin Elections Commission (WEC), or a designee, "shall publicly canvass the returns and make his or her certifications and determinations on or before the 3rd Wednesday following a partisan primary." That means all primary election results are preliminary results until the WEC certification on or before Wednesday, August 24.