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**Democratic Party’s focus in Wisconsin goes beyond Milwaukee**

*By WisPolitics.com*

Democratic National Convention Committee CEO Joe Solmonese told an audience of journalists in Milwaukee recently that the Democratic Party aims to correct the errors that led to President Trump’s win in 2016.

“We fell short in 2016, and while you can’t boil the outcome of any election down to one cause, one of the errors that we made was failing to communicate effectively as we could in key states,” Solmonese said Jan. 7 during a panel discussion with Gov. Tony Evers, Lt. Gov. Mandela Barnes and state Treasurer Sarah Godlewski.

The panel discussion came a week before President Trump was scheduled to host a rally in Milwaukee.

Solmonese said at this stage, organizers are getting out into Wisconsin communities “to make sure more communities of every background feel included, seen and heard.”

“We’re making it a priority to get out across the state, into Wisconsin communities, getting to know the people, listening to their stories and making sure that our convention reflects what they want to see and what they want to hear,” he said.

He said the July 2020 convention “is less about spectacle and more about substance.”

“When we bring the eyes of the world to Wisconsin, we’re going to remind the American people what Democrats stand for, from affordable health care to higher wages to common-sense gun reform,” Solmonese said. “And if we pull that off, I am confident that we will win in November.”

Evers said he believes Wisconsin will be the state that elects the next president and he wants to make sure each candidate gets a chance to share their ideas with Wisconsin voters.

He said the convention will serve as a window to the state.

“We have very few chances to talk about what a great state this is,” Evers said. “From my vantage point as governor, we need to make sure we tell a good story about Wisconsin.”

Barnes said the Democratic Party “can no longer take states like Wisconsin for granted.”

He noted his and Evers’ efforts to get around the state during the 2018 election to hear from voters.

“In 2018, we made sure that we had those conversations,” Barnes said. “That’s why we were able to drive historic midterm turnout. Now we know we need to have historic turnout in the presidential election in order for us to be successful.”

And he said there is still an opportunity for growth for Democrats in Wisconsin.

“People need to know that you care about them because for far too long people have been ignored,” Barnes said. “And that’s why the 2016 election ended the way that it did, largely. ”

Godlewski said as she travels the state, she hears a theme of economic insecurity, from people struggling with paying off student loans to preparing for retirement.

“They’re not looking for a free ride, but they’re looking for a way in which they can have a good, quality middle-class lifestyle,” Godlewski said. “And I think what they will see is they’re not getting that with what’s going on in Washington and that they want change.”

In response to the media walkthrough, Trump Victory spokeswoman Anna Kelly said the convention will demonstrate why Trump won Wisconsin.

“From abolishing all private health insurance which would eliminate over 3.5 million Wisconsinites’ private plans, to tearing down border walls, to eliminating all fossil fuels costing nearly 100,000 Wisconsinites their jobs, the Democrats’ flashy media tour cannot hide that their radical policy proposals are wrong for Wisconsin,” Kelly said in a statement. “This summer’s convention will only remind Wisconsin voters why they delivered their 10 electoral votes to President Trump in 2016 and why they will do so again in November.”

The Democratic media event also included a welcome reception at Discovery World. There was an update on logistics and security, a presentation about Milwaukee’s history and changes the city has seen, and an overview of Democrats’ 2020 strategy.

Media were also invited on bus tours of Milwaukee landmarks and neighborhoods.

Speaking during the panel discussion on 2020 strategy, David Bergstein, battleground state communications director for the DNC, said that although Trump faces headwinds, Democrats aren’t “taking anything for granted this cycle.”

He said the party is not only reaching out to the base to boost turnout but is also trying to persuade “disgruntled Republicans” and others in suburban communities and rural areas.

He said the convention will serve as an organizing opportunity to build a team of volunteers and keep them active, so whoever the nominee is, they can have a quick ramp-up of the general election campaign.

Philip Shulman, director of Trump Rapid Response, said the party has hired 17 field staff, has been training organizers in the state and has knocked on 54,000 doors here so far.

He also said neighborhood action teams formed during the 2018 election are still active.

State Democratic Party spokeswoman Courtney Beyer said the party aims to use this April’s Supreme Court race as a dry run for 2020 organizing efforts and then adjust where needed.

She noted that thousands of volunteers will be in Milwaukee for the convention, which the party aims to organize to participate throughout the November election.

“We’re working to build an organizing program that will channel that energy and enthusiasm into tangible work that they can do in their communities,” she said.

*The Capitol Report is written by editorial staff at WisPolitics.com, a nonpartisan, Madison-based news service that specializes in coverage of government and politics, and is distributed for publication by members of the Wisconsin Newspaper Association.*

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