***EDITOR’S NOTE*:*This column is provided to Wisconsin Newspaper Association members by WisPolitics.com. Proper attribution in your newspapers IS REQUIRED, including the byline “WisPolitics.com” and the tagline at the end of the column*.**

**Democratic field grows in 2022 U.S. Senate race**

*By WisPolitics.com*

While Republican Sen. Ron Johnson keeps everybody waiting on his 2022 plans, Democratic activists are eyeing a growing field of declared and potential candidates to take him on next year.

The field includes five declared candidates. Another potential candidate has formed an exploratory committee. And a third, Lt. Gov. Mandela Barnes, is mentioned as a possible candidate.

Six of that field addressed the state Democratic Party’s virtual convention on the first weekend in June, pitching their platforms and slamming the incumbent.

Outagamie County Executive Tom Nelson criticized Johnson, R-Oshkosh, and other wealthy politicians and contrasted his experience working as a public servant in the Assembly and three-time county executive.

“This race ought not to be a competition of bank accounts or pedigrees, that is not who we are,” he said. “Two-thirds of the U.S. Senate are millionaires, including Ron Johnson. Adding another billionaire or millionaire is not the answer.”

He added that any Democratic candidate who wants to win the seat in 2022 will have to work to win the rural counties he says the Democratic Party has forgotten over the past few years.

State Treasurer Sarah Godlewski also took jabs at Johnson, who she said is out of touch with reality. “Wisconsinites deserve so much better than McCarthyism 2.0.”

She said her immediate focus if elected to the position would be to get rid of the filibuster. Godlewski also said she would focus on passing legislation to protect voting rights, fund infrastructure projects and raise the minimum wage to $15 an hour.

“I believe in fighting for kitchen table issues that will actually help working families,” she said. “As a working mom, I understand the importance of affordable childcare and paid family leave. Right now the system is not built for moms and people of color.”

Alex Lasry, who is taking a leave of absence from his role as a senior vice president with the Milwaukee Bucks, said Johnson needs to go. Lasry said he wants to provide U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin, D-Madison, the Democratic Wisconsin wingman she’s been missing for the past 10 years.

Lasry added he would focus on increasing the minimum wage to $15 an hour to help struggling families have more financial freedom and stability, adding the Bucks already pay all of their employees at least $15 an hour.

And he said his campaign would focus on racial and social justice, drug incarceration and recidivism, and voting rights.

“These are the values that we’re going to be expressing throughout the campaign,” Lasry said. “That progressive values are not only good for business, are not just good for the economy, but are also good for the

country.”

State Sen. Chris Larson, D-Milwaukee, said he will focus on “ending the creeping, festering fascism that’s overtaking America.”

He said he’s running to replace Johnson because he wants to make sure Wisconsin doesn’t have a senator who just represents his own interests in D.C. He added he wants to restore dignity once Johnson is out and make sure government works for everybody instead of the wealthy few.

He said creating universal healthcare for all and addressing issues within the health care system itself will be important in working to “unrig” the system. He also said he would push for the Green New Deal and a wealth tax.

Wausau radiologist Dr. Gillian Battino was the only declared candidate not to mention Johnson in her five-minute speech, but said she would focus on getting affordable healthcare for everyone if elected.

“It’s time for Medicare for all,” she said. “Health care is a human right, it’s not a privilege, and that’s why I’m stepping up.”

She said her 20 years of experience as a physician working with the World Health Organization and other international and national groups gives her a leg up on dealing with health care. She added that it’s important to also address the racial and economic inequities in the health care system.

“We are the wealthiest country in the world,” Battino said. “America is the land of the free, but if you have to choose between your health and financial ruin, you are not free.”

A potential candidate, Millennial Action Project founder Steven Olikara said his campaign would focus primarily on values rather than specific policies.

“I think leading with our values is the most powerful expression of democratic change,” said Olikara, who has formed an exploratory committee.

He said those values would focus on creating dignity for everyone.

Olikara said past focus on values led to the removal of Jim Crow laws and the ending of British rule over India, and that focusing on values now will lead to even more powerful change in the future.

At a WisPolitics.com-Milwaukee Press Club event in early June, Johnson said his decision to delay announcing whether he will seek re-election is saving Wisconsinites from a long campaign.

He said the public won’t be paying attention this year to Senate campaigns, adding he feels there’s still plenty of time for anyone else who wants to run for his seat even if he waits until next year to make a decision. He said his short 2010 campaign that led him to unseat three-term incumbent Russ Feingold is proof other candidates

can run a viable race if they announce later on; Johnson announced his Republican bid in April 2010.

And he said he may change his mind on his 2010 pledge to not serve more than two terms. He said circumstances have changed and Republicans losing majority status in the House in 2016 showed him he

has a greater responsibility than just following through on that promise.

*For more, visit WisPolitics.com*

*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.*

*Copyright © WisPolitics.com*