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**Wisconsin GOP grapples with complaints on endorsement process, establishment**

By WisPolitics.com

State Party Chair Paul Farrow says the engagement he’s seeing from the grassroots is unlike anything he’s seen before.

It’s just some of them have forgotten all the conservative priorities GOP lawmakers delivered pre-2016.

There’s been noticeable grumbling among some GOP activists over the last couple of years about the “establishment” and “Madison Republicans” over things that range from election integrity to the party’s endorsement process in statewide races.

Farrow told WisPolitics.com in a new interview previewing the May state convention, in the Madison suburb of Middleton, that many of those frustrated with the party didn’t get active until 2016, when Donald Trump was on the ballot for the first time. They’ve also forgotten things like Act 10, right-to-work, concealed carry and photo ID that got done before they got active.

So Farrow has to remind them of what Republicans were able to do when they had the East Wing and why they’re unable to do more with Democrat Tony Evers in the governor's office.

“They realize that it’s not as much as we screwed something up as we’re now playing the blockers. We have a governor who doesn’t agree with how we want to get things done,” Farrow said.

The party’s endorsement process is one example of the frustrations that some in the base have expressed with calls to allow the “people to decide.”

Farrow argued that’s exactly what the party is doing. He noted county parties weigh in on local races and congressional district-level parties are free to endorse candidates in U.S. House races. It’s all about the party finding those who are “the embodiment of what we want as a Republican candidate.”

Of all the endorsement votes, the one for governor will be the most closely watched next weekend. The party’s Rules Committee approved allowing a “no endorsement” option in the process, and delegates will vote on that on May 21 before going through the process.

Former Lt. Gov. Rebecca Kleefisch, businessman Kevin Nicholson and Rep. Tim Ramthun all met a requirement of raising $100,000 by March 15 to be considered for the party’s endorsement.

Tim Michels, an executive with the Michels Corp., didn’t get into the race officially until April 25. But he has received an exemption from the party that will allow him to be considered, Farrow said.

Farrow said Michels reached out to the party ahead of his formal announcement and indicated he had wanted to get in earlier than he did, but was prevented by “unforeseen challenges.”

He then requested an exemption that would allow him to be considered in the endorsement process.

As part of that, Michels was asked to show he had raised $1 million, to sign a unity pledge, and agree to support the party platform. Farrow said Michels met those requirements and will be eligible.

Though some have urged the party to drop the endorsement process, Farrow said he still believes it has value. He noted if party activists want to scrap the process or make changes, they will have that opportunity at the 2023 state convention.

“We always look for those individuals that are the influence-makers in our lives,” Farrow said. “I think the endorsement process is still that influence-maker that people have as they’re looking at suggestions and recommendations for the constitutional officers.”

Looking to the fall, Farrow argued one of the biggest challenges Republicans face is getting their message out that the state is headed in the wrong direction.

He pointed out that the latest Marquette University Law School Poll found that 56% of voters believe the state is headed in the wrong direction. He said inflation is at a 40-year high, and the April elections showed parents want a greater say in their kids’ education.

Farrow accused the media of not fully reporting on those issues.

“What the challenge is the media doesn’t want to look at that and the Democrats definitely don’t want people to make their own decisions. They want to make all the decisions for you and just pat you on the head and say ‘You know what, listen to us, we know far better than you do,’” Farrow said.

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