Bail jumping, evading police, sexual assault among legal troubles candidates faced, records show

By WisPolitics.com

State and federal candidates on the ballot have faced legal troubles for issues ranging from eluding police to bail jumping, according to a WisPolitics.com review of online court records.

Contacted by WisPolitics.com, some candidates downplayed the issues or chalked them up to misunderstandings. Some said they were working to address the issues.

WisPolitics.com regularly checks online court records after the filing deadline in election years to determine if candidates on the fall ballot have had legal troubles. For incumbents, the search was limited to their most recent terms, since old issues have been addressed in past stories.

Travis Clark, 48, in 1998 was found guilty of 4th degree sexual assault and then in 1999 was found guilty of evading police. Clark in the evasion case was also found guilty for being a party to a crime when others in the car shot at police chasing them.

Clark is running as a Republican in the 4th Congressional District. He will face fellow Republican Tim Rogers in the August primary. The winner of that primary will go on to face U.S. Rep. Gwen Moore,
D-Milwaukee, in November.

Clark told WisPolitics.com the sexual assault charge came after he unknowingly had sex with a minor whose mother reported the issue to the police after the two met at a club that was supposed to check IDs at the door. The two had a daughter as a result, and Clark said he now has a grandson from that daughter. He has four other children.

State Sen. Lena Taylor, D-Milwaukee, represented Clark on the sexual assault case in court.

He said much of his delinquency was because he had no male role models growing up and had to figure out how to be an adult on his own while his mother worked two jobs to support them. The Briggs & Stratton employee of 18 years also said criminals aren’t born, they are a product of their environment.

Clark added: “If we don’t get more individuals with that same experience, how can you make policies and laws on individuals whose lives are not perfect that you’ve never experienced?”

Republican Shaun Clarmont, 51, of Green Bay in 2013 pleaded guilty to bail jumping in a case where he was also charged with felony possession of marijuana and possession of drug paraphernalia. He was
also charged with battery and disorderly conduct, and both charges were given domestic abuse modifiers for infliction of physical pain or injury. All but the bail jumping charge were read in and dropped. Clarmont is running for U.S. Rep. Mike Gallagher’s 8th CD seat.

Clarmont, owner of Airport Auto Service Center in Green Bay, in an email told WisPolitics.com he felt he proved his innocence in court.

“Absolutely no crime of violence has ever been committed by me therefore no prosecution of such crime is ever mentioned,” he said. “This is a ten year old family matter and all has been reconciled long
ago.”

Clarmont also denied the dropped charges, calling them “accusations with no evidence.” He said police had pursued “frivolous statements.”

“My integrity is intact and I am pursuing this for the best interest of my family and my country, Clarmont said of his candidacy.

Meanwhile, former Shawano County Board member Peter Schmidt was charged with disorderly conduct in 2019 after choking an employee at his farm who had overslept and was late for work. The Republican vying for the seat of retiring Rep. Gary Tauchen, R-Bonduel, was also charged with criminal trespass for entering the employee’s residence.

The court put Schmidt on two year’s probation and ordered him to attend anger management and undergo a psychological assessment. He was also ordered to write a letter of apology to the victim.

“As a farmer and small business leader I’m busy taking care of our dairy herd and creating jobs,” Schmidt said in a statement to WisPolitics.com. “The local folks who know me understand this was a minor incident blown out of proportion, but I worked with law enforcement and the legal system to reach a conclusion.”

Shawano County Board member William Switalla, a Dem also running for Tauchen’s open seat, was charged with theft of moveable property over $2,500 in 2018. Switalla told WisPolitics.com he was charged for taking a grill from a garage on an abandoned property.

Switalla said he got permission to go onto the property to clean it up and took the grill, but later took it back.

“When I found out they cared, I took it back. It was no big deal. It was an old meth house I was cleaning up for them,” Switalla said.

Switalla noted the people who made the complaint were active in the Republican Party at the time and were trying to make him look bad. He said he did not break into the garage.

“I was cleaning up the garbage and I had been on the county board for 10 years and gone through many properties before that and never had an issue,” Switalla said. “And this time they decided that they could get me.”

Court records for Milwaukee minister David King, a Republican running for lieutenant governor, show he owes $122,782 in unpaid child support as of Thursday. King told WisPolitics.com most of the payments due are interest on previous payments.

According to the Department of Children and Families, Wisconsinites accrue a half percent interest per month — or 6 percent per year — on past-due child support. Interest charges begin once the past-due
amount is greater than the amount due in one month.

King said his children have grown up, and he is paying off the money he owes. He added he has been transparent about the payments, and it isn’t something he’s trying to hide.

Republican Jon Kaiser was convicted of drunken driving in March. The businessman is in the running for the 29th Senate District seat of retiring Sen. Jerry Petrowski, R-Marathon. Kaiser did not return requests for comment on the charge.

Records also show Republican Cory Tomczyk has filed a lawsuit against the Wausau Pilot & Review for defamation and libel. The Republican was named in a 2021 article by the publication for allegedly calling a 13-year-old boy a homophobic slur during a Marathon County Board of Supervisors meeting.

Tomczyk, who is also running for Petrowski’s seat, denies he made the comments.

Godfrey and Kahn attorney Brian Spahn told WisPolitics.com the paper and reporter Damakant Jayshi are “vigorously defending” against the lawsuit.

Other records include:

\*Republican Maryann Zimmerman also had a tax warrant from the Department of Revenue in 2021 for $13,764. Zimmerman told WisPolitics.com the taxes were from a business she owned and she filed
them incorrectly. She said she hired a new firm and found she only actually owed $200, which she said she paid. Zimmerman is running for the seat of Rep. Amy Loudenbeck, R-Clinton, who is pursuing a bid for secretary of state.

\*Republican Jay Stone has filed a lawsuit against the Wisconsin Elections Commission for fining him $500 and dismissing three election complaints he filed as lacking reasonable suspicion and being “frivolous.” Stone, who has pushed unfounded theories about the legitimacy of the 2020 presidential election, will take on Sen. Van Wanggaard in an August primary for the Racine Republican’s 21st Senate
District seat.

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