The first official GOP candidate for governor in 2026

By WisPolitics.com

The 2026 elections seem far away. Unless you are a potential candidate.

The year BEFORE election year is when you get your campaign going.

So it makes sense that one of the least known potential candidates — Washington County Executive Josh Schoemann -- has officially kicked off his campaign for governor next year.

Schoemann, 43 and a vet, needs the time to travel the state, get to know Republican voters and donors and try out campaign themes.

He most certainly will be in a Republican primary next summer if he sticks it out. There won't be a Democratic primary unless Dem Gov. Tony Evers opts out of a bid for a third four-year term.

Schoemann, first elected county exec in 2020, launched his campaign while accusing Dem Evers and the status quo of failing Wisconsin. He said entrepreneurs can’t afford to pursue their dreams in Wisconsin, young families can’t afford to put down roots, and parents and grandparents can’t afford to retire here.

Schoemann said he regularly runs into people living down south who are proud to say they’re from Wisconsin.

“I, for one, think it’s about damn time we build a Wisconsin where people are proud to be, not just be from,” Schoemann said during a kickoff event in West Bend.

Schoemann took a series of shots at Evers, who hasn’t announced whether he will seek a third term next year. Schoemann said even if Evers “calls it quits on his own — God willing,” the Dems who would run to replace him would only offer the same failed status quo.

Schoemann slammed Evers for a veto he issued in the 2023-25 budget that annually increases the cap on per pupil spending through 2425, saying it would lead to four centuries of property tax increases. He hit Evers for proposing higher fees on hunting and fishing and car registrations in the 2025-27 budget, saying Evers’ spending plan would take Wisconsin from a surplus to a deficit in two years.

“We have a state government built for 1975 and 1995, not 2025 and certainly not 2045,” Schoemann said.

Democratic Governors Association spokesperson Izzi Levy said in a statement that Schoemann “brings to this race a toxic record of attacking public schools, opposing reproductive freedom, and championing Elon Musk’s attacks on the programs and service Wisconsinites rely on.”

Schoemann is the first Republican to officially enter the field.

Others mentioned as possible candidates include: businessman Bill Berrien; U.S. Rep. Tom Tiffany, R-Minocqua; Senate President Mary Felzkowski, R-Tomahawk; businessman Eric Hovde; and state Sen. Pat Testin, R-Stevens Point.

Dems who have been mentioned  by political insiders as possible candidates if Evers doesn't run include: Milwaukee County Executive David Crowley; Milwaukee Mayor Cavalier Johnson; Attorney General Josh Kaul; Secretary of State Sarah Godlewski; Lt. Gov. Sara Rodriguez; and outgoing state Dem Party Chair Ben Wikler.

Watch what the field does in 2025; that will be a key to 2026.

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