



MADISON, Wis. — This morning, new [reporting](#) from Al Weaver and Julia Manchester at The Hill highlighted the impending “[messy](#)” primary and “[expensive](#)” fight that Republicans are facing in their uphill battle in the Wisconsin Senate race.

[The Hill: Republicans face tough bid to oust Baldwin in Wisconsin Senate race](#)

Republicans are facing an uphill climb in the Wisconsin Senate race after Rep. Mike Gallagher (R-Wis.) decided against a bid next year, hurting their chances to unseat Sen. Tammy Baldwin (D-Wis.).

[...]

*“**Tammy Baldwin is good.** Republicans have always underestimated her in the past, kind of the same way Democrats underestimate Ron Johnson,” one Wisconsin-based GOP operative told The Hill, adding that she’ll be “very well-funded.”*

With Gallagher stepping aside, a number of other Republican names have been floated, headlined by a pair of potential self-funders — former hedge fund manager Eric Hovde and businessman Scott Mayer — and Rep. Tom Tiffany (R-Wis.). Former Milwaukee County Sheriff David Clarke has continued to tease a potential bid.

***Given the likely expensive battle,** a self-funder is attractive to the GOP for a number of reasons. According to a second Wisconsin-based GOP operative, Hovde, who lost the chance to face Baldwin in 2012 after narrowly falling in the GOP primary to former Wisconsin Gov. Tommy Thompson, has moved closer to a bid in recent months by making calls and trying to assemble a team ahead of a potential run.*

[...]

Meanwhile, questions surround the possible candidacy of Mayer, who runs a staffing company based out of Milwaukee. He said recently that he hopes to decide on a run by Labor Day but remains a major unknown to the electorate and to Wisconsin politicians.

"I don't know him that well either," Johnson told *The Hill*.¹

The second operative noted that Mayer has truly come "out of the woodwork" in recent months and will have much to do in order to boost his name recognition in a primary field that could include Hovde, who has been on a statewide ballot, and members of the Wisconsin congressional delegation or state legislature. While that can be beneficial in a race, as it was for Johnson in his 2010 victory, strategists argue that it could be too much to ask.²

As for Tiffany, he is viewed as one of the sharper political and policy minds in the Wisconsin GOP ranks. However, running against one or more self-funders could be an issue if he decides to forego running for reelection in his deep-red district.³

[...]

Wisconsin Democrats, on the other hand, appear to be hoping for a run from Clarke, who is known for his past inflammatory statements and support of former President Trump.⁴

"The Wisconsin GOP is staring down another messy, chaotic, intraparty primary, with Sheriff David Clarke leading the pack," the party said in a statement.

Clarke is continuing to garner attention as he publicly weighs jumping into the race. Last week, he touted a survey from the left-leaning Public Policy Polling that showed him **leading a hypothetical primary field with 40 percent support.**

The poll, which was conducted before Gallagher took himself out of the running, showed the congressman at 20 percent support. Tiffany came in at 10 percent, and Hovde at 3 percent.⁵

[...]

Regardless, national Democrats remain bullish about their chances in the state, especially in a presidential year with an incumbent senator who has proven to be tough to oust.

"She just connects with the people of Wisconsin in every way, and especially with working people," said Sen. Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.), who served as chair of the Senate Democratic campaign arm during Baldwin's 2018 reelection battle. **"Everything she does is looking out for working people in Wisconsin. That's what drives her here; that's what motivates her here. And I think the people of Wisconsin know it."**

Democrats also point to statewide successes in the state's Supreme Court race earlier this year, which saw liberals take control of the court for the first time in 15 years. **Justice-elect Janet Protasiewicz made abortion access a key issue in her campaign, which Baldwin**

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Written by WisDems Press

Wednesday, 14 June 2023 15:54 -

and Democrats are expected to do again next year.