



THOMPSON OUT

Former Gov. Tommy Thompson opts out of joining governor's race

Republican Tommy Thompson announced today he won't run for gov this fall after flirting with a fifth bid for the office he held for 14 years.

"This is a very difficult conclusion," Thompson said. "After a full life of service and leading and growing businesses, I know I have the vision, drive and vitality to serve another term as governor. Wisconsin needs strong leadership to bridge political divides, care for our most vulnerable, set our economy on a path to succeed in the 21st-century, and again make us the shining star of the nation. I would have brought those qualities and commitment as governor."

Thompson, who just wrapped up leading the UW System as president, said he is "open and will continue to investigate how I may otherwise serve."

Thompson was first elected to the office in 1986 and went on to win reelection three times as he became the longest serving governor in Wisconsin history. He resigned midway through his fourth term to join George W. Bush's administration as

secretary of Health and Human Services.

After leaving the cabinet, Thompson also flirted with gubernatorial bids in 2006 and 2010 before running for U.S. Senate in 2012 and losing to Dem Tammy Baldwin.

Thompson and Madison businessman Eric Hovde both considered runs this fall before deciding against getting into the race in recent days.

That leaves former Lt. Gov. Rebecca Kleefisch, businessman Kevin Nicholson and state Rep. Tim Ramthun as the most prominent Republicans in the GOP field to take on Dem Gov. Tony Evers.

Businessman Tim Michels has also been considering a run.

State Public Defender: Court backlog will take years to clear

Wisconsin State Public Defender Kelli Thompson says it will take several years to clear a backlog of roughly 35,000 cases because of a shortage of public defenders.

"It is a statewide problem," Thompson

said on WISN's "UpFront," produced in partnership with WisPolitics.com. "It's something that we all have to be talking about."

Thompson, who leads the state agency, said the pandemic exacerbated a problem that was already forming.

"We have hindering people's rights to a speedy trial," she said. "We have individuals sitting in custody waiting for their day in court. We have individuals whose family members are impacted because they're not home with their families."

Thompson said the agency is currently down 17 percent to 20 percent of its typical attorneys.

"We're seeing this across the economy," Thompson said. "Every business has shortages. Everyone is looking for employees. We're looking for public defenders. We're looking for staff."

State supreme court approves GOP district maps

The Wisconsin Supreme Court in a 4-3 ruling Friday implemented the maps GOP lawmakers had proposed, finding they are race neutral and stick to the least-change approach the justices had previously set as a foundation for the lines.

The maps — barring a further legal challenge — could put Republicans on the verge of two-thirds majorities in both houses of the Legislature after the upcoming elections.

Republicans currently have a 61-38 majority in the Assembly and 21-12 majority in the Senate.

Under the current maps in place since 2011, Joe Biden won 37 Assembly districts as he took the statewide contest by more than 20,000 votes. If the GOP map had been in place two years ago, he would've won 35.

Both the existing Senate map and the one Republicans proposed have 11 Biden districts.

Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, R-Rochester, said it was a "relief" to have the maps resolved so candidates could start circulating nomination papers for the fall elections. The decision came down the same day that candidates were supposed to begin circulating nomination papers for the fall elections.

Crime labs processing more cases, but turnaround times lag

The state crime labs were better at turning around DNA cases submitted in 2021 than the year before.

But it took longer, on average, to process them, according to the Department of Justice's annual report on the Division of Forensic Sciences.

GOP AG candidates Adam Jarchow and Eric Toney both knocked Dem incumbent Josh Kaul for the lab's performance under his watch.

But Kaul, who's up for reelection this fall, argued in an interview the state is on the right track with the crime lab after a challenging 2020 due to COVID-19 that forced a reorganization to account for safety protocols.

He also noted Gov. Tony Evers last month announced \$5 million in federal COVID-19 funds for the labs as part of an effort to address a backlog of criminal cases that built up during the pandemic, which hampered court proceedings.

"It's back to a downward trend," Kaul said of processing DNA cases. "Compared to where it was four-five years ago, you can see we're moving in the right direction when it comes to DNA analysis."

WI in line for \$283 million in federal road aid

Wisconsin is in line for an additional \$283 million in federal transportation aid in the current fiscal year.

The bulk of the additional money comes from the recently signed bipartisan infrastructure law. The Department of Transportation wants to put \$123.6 million of it into the state highway rehabilitation program, according to a letter the agency sent to the Joint Finance Committee.

The letter noted an abundance of projects awaiting funding from the state's main highway improvement program. That would make it easier to get the money obligated by Sept. 30. That's the deadline for the state to allocate the bulk of the additional federal money. Otherwise, it would risk losing the funds, according to the letter.

The agency also wants to put \$83.8 million into local transportation facility assistance and \$60.7 million into local bridge assistance.

Under state law, the agency must submit a plan to the Joint Finance Committee for review anytime federal funds are 105 percent or more of what had been appropriated in a fiscal year. The extra \$283 million is 35.2 percent above what the state had expected to receive from the feds.

The pot of additional money includes \$55 million that the federal government redistributed after states that had received the funds failed to use it by a deadline. **CP**

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