

Survey of Candidates for Governor on Retirement Issues
By Protect Our Wisconsin Retirement Security (POWRS)
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The following statements are the unedited responses of the candidates.

*POWRS (Protect Our Wisconsin Retirement Security) is a network of statewide retirement activists working to protect the WRS (Wisconsin Retirement System) and bring retirement security to all Wisconsinites. We work in close cooperation and association with the WIARA (Wisconsin Alliance for Retired Americans) and numerous other organizations.

The Wisconsin Retirement System (WRS) is one of America’s premiere defined benefit systems for active and retired public employees. It distributes nearly \$6 billion annually to annuitants. Unfortunately, private sector workers and retirees must rely on riskier and often more costly, lower-return defined contribution plans like 401 (k)s. Many have no employer-sponsored retirement plan at all.

Question #1: As governor, would you support the creation of a separate private sector defined benefit retirement system modeled after the WRS? In the mid-2010s, such plans were moved forward by Sen. Dave Hansen and Rep. Eric Genrich.

Mandela Barnes	Yes, I support ensuring that both public and private sector employees have access to robust, competitive benefit and retirement programs. Wisconsin workers have gone for far too long without high-end benefits because of Scott Walker’s attacks on unions. Beyond repealing Act 10 and restoring collective bargaining rights, we need to establish a revenue neutral, optional retirement plan for private sector employees to have the opportunity to retire with comfort. By implementing this plan, we can create competition in the marketplace by giving Wisconsinites in the private sector an option to buy into and employers will have to improve their benefit programs, raising the quality of benefits across the board. Wisconsinites are hard workers, and they deserve nothing less than a retirement plan that treats them with respect and dignity—I’ll deliver that when I’m Governor.
Kelda Roys	Yes, I have been the lead on similar legislation in the senate. This is critical to ensuring all Wisconsinites have economic security and the freedom to thrive.
David Crowley	<p>We should all be very proud that Wisconsin is home to one of the strongest public pension systems in the country. The Wisconsin Retirement System proves that a well-managed, defined benefit model can deliver stability, strong returns, and dignity in retirement for working people. It’s a model that works and sets a high bar for what retirement security should look like.</p> <p>At the same time, we have to be honest about the gap facing private-sector workers. Too many people are relying on 401(k)s that shift all the risk onto the individual, or they don’t have access to any retirement plan at all. That’s not sustainable, and it’s not fair to people who have spent a lifetime working and contributing to our economy.</p> <p>As Governor, I would support seriously exploring the creation of a retirement system for private-sector workers modeled on the strengths of the WRS. That means taking a careful, data-driven approach which works with labor, employers, and financial experts to design a system that is fiscally responsible, sustainable, and accessible. We should build on the leadership shown by Senator Hansen and then-Representative Genrich and examine how we can adapt those ideas to today’s economic realities.</p>

	<p>My goal is to expand retirement security without compromising the strength of the WRS. Whether through a defined benefit-style model or a strong state-facilitated alternative, I'm committed to making sure more Wisconsin workers have a reliable path to retire with dignity.</p>
Francesca Hong	<p>Sen. Hansen and Rep. Genrich's bill called for the creation of a Wisconsin Private Retirement Security Board to develop a model plan and hold public hearings and feasibility studies. I'm interested in restarting that process. The 401(k) and IRA model creates administrative burdens on private sector workers with lower returns and has no guarantee against the kind of inflation we've seen under the Trump administration — I'd like to find out what alternatives are.</p>
Sara Rodriguez	<p>The Wisconsin Retirement System is a Wisconsin success story, a fully funded, professionally managed, shared-risk system that has provided dignity in retirement for generations of public servants and is consistently rated among the strongest pension systems in the country. I believe the security our public employees count on should not be a privilege limited to those who work for the state. Yet today, far too many Wisconsinites in the private sector reach retirement age with little or nothing saved, no employer-sponsored plan, and a 401(k) framework that shifts all of the risk onto the worker.</p> <p>That is a problem worth solving, and I take the work Senator Hansen and then-Representative Genrich began seriously. Their legislation got the premise right: before Wisconsin builds anything new, we owe workers, employers, and retirees the kind of rigorous, transparent feasibility study and statewide public hearings their bills called for. Whatever we ultimately design must protect, not jeopardize, the integrity of the WRS, and must reflect input from retirees, organized labor, the small business community, ETF, and the State of Wisconsin Investment Board.</p> <p>We can also learn from what is working elsewhere. More than 20 states have launched state facilitated retirement programs for private-sector workers without access to an employer plan, collectively bringing hundreds of thousands of new savers and more than a billion dollars in assets into the system. Many of these are auto-IRA programs rather than defined benefit plans, but they show that states can help close the coverage gap, and they give Wisconsin models to evaluate.</p> <p>The retirement security crisis facing private-sector workers is real, and Wisconsin should be leading on it. As governor, I will be a serious partner in that conversation.</p>
Missy Hughes	<p>Every Wisconsinite must be able to retire in dignity. I believe we need to look to any options at our disposal, including the creation of a private sector WRS alternative, to ensure that older Wisconsinites have the resources they need, and younger Wisconsinites can be assured that they will have security as they age.</p>

Social Security is a retirement anchor for Wisconsin’s nearly 1.2 million seniors over 65. It is the only income source for nearly 25% of them (AARP). Yet, Social Security may soon reach a breaking point under constant Republican attack and decades of bipartisan failure to fix its fiscal problems.

Question #2: As governor, what would you do to provide alternative opportunities to assure Wisconsin’s seniors access to retirement security? Would you support a state-sponsored income supplement for the elderly?

<p>Mandela Barnes</p>	<p>When I’m Governor, I’ll do everything in my power to stand up against Donald Trump’s attempts to rip Social Security away from our seniors. He’s gutted the Social Security agency, and he and his MAGA allies threaten day-after-day to eradicate the program entirely. While it is a federal program, I’ll do everything in my power at the state level to both maintain Social Security and ensure our seniors have financial stability and security in their retirements. I will work to strengthen targeted tax incentives and relief for seniors, including the homestead tax credit, along with other relief for property taxes which we can deliver by fully funding our schools. I support looking into additional tax exemptions for seniors and retirees to make sure that they have the financial stability they need as MAGA Republicans like Tom Tiffany and Donald Trump look to tear apart Social Security.</p>
<p>Kelda Roys</p>	<p>Yes, though I realize that political and budgetary realities may not lend themselves to a large investment like this for the elderly.</p> <p>There are other ways to increase financial security for the elderly. Allowing everyone to buy into the WRS is the best long-term solution to allow Wisconsinites to enjoy a secure retirement. I’ve long been a leader on supporting seniors with good public policy. In the Assembly 15 years ago, I helped lead the fight to save SeniorCare, which was a far superior plan than Medicare Part D. Right now, however, we need to increase the availability of affordable housing, decrease the cost and increase access to in-home care and support for independent living, reduce property taxes, and increase Food Share benefits.</p> <p>As the only candidate with state budget experience as a member of the Joint Finance Committee, I know where we should invest to help seniors live with dignity and economic security. preparation for retirement. I have authored many bills to lower costs that affect seniors. Here are just a few examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Expanding the earned income tax credit to help lower income people make ends meet ● Increasing the homestead tax exemption to lower property taxes ● Reviving the dormant WHEDA property tax home loan program that enables seniors to stay in their homes by paying their property taxes with low-interest state-backed loans that don’t need to be repaid until the property transfers hands ● Increasing food and nutrition security, including Badger Boxes, which distribute healthy, locally grown food to seniors in need ● Supports for family caregivers, in-home care providers, CNAs, and other professionals who make it possible for older adults to thrive and be healthy ● Funding for falls prevention ● Capping the cost of common prescription drugs, including insulin, at \$35/month ● Cracking down on so-called crypto kiosks, which are defrauding hardworking Wisconsinites of tens of millions of dollars

	<p>every year</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Outlawing discriminatory price gouging, where grocers and retailers use personalized information like your credit score and income to display and charge a higher price to individuals they predict can pay more
<p>David Crowley</p>	<p>Social Security is a lifeline for hundreds of thousands of Wisconsin seniors and we have to protect it, especially as the attacks from Washington keep coming every single day. But we also can't ignore the reality that far too many older adults are living on the edge, with little or no additional income to fall back on. As Governor, I will focus on strengthening the full picture of retirement security. Additionally, we need to build stronger state-level support systems. I would support exploring a targeted, state-sponsored income supplement for seniors, designed to help those who are most at risk of falling into poverty. Any proposal must be fiscally responsible and focused on those who need it most, but we should not shy away from solutions that provide real stability for older Wisconsinites who have worked their entire lives and provided the future for our next generations.</p> <p>I would also prioritize expanding retirement options for current workers so fewer people reach retirement without savings in the first place. This could include creating a state-sponsored retirement savings program and exploring broader models that build on the success of the Wisconsin Retirement System. My goal is to make sure every Wisconsinite can retire with dignity and security.</p>
<p>Francesca Hong</p>	<p>The fight for Social Security, once considered a third rail, is of an existential nature to millions of seniors across America. As governor, I will be a loud advocate for federal solutions to a jeopardized Social Security program, and will lend my platform to organizing federal electoral responses. Across the spectrum, I'd be interested in learning more about what the state can do for seniors who are being left behind.</p>
<p>Sara Rodriguez</p>	<p>Social Security is a promise Wisconsinites paid into their entire working lives, and it must be defended. The fact that nearly a quarter of our seniors rely on it as their only source of income, and that the Congressional Budget Office now projects the retirement trust fund could be depleted as soon as 2032, triggering automatic benefit cuts of more than 20 percent, makes this an urgent crisis.</p> <p>As governor, I will be a clear voice for protecting earned benefits and against any effort to cut them, raise the retirement age, or privatize the program. I will press our congressional delegation to deliver real solutions that put Social Security on solid footing for current and future retirees, and ensure the system has the revenue it needs to keep its promise.</p> <p>Governors also have real tools to bolster retirement security at the state level, and Wisconsin already has a foundation worth building on. Our state SSI Supplement, which the Department of Health Services raised by 10 percent earlier this year, adds to the federal SSI payment for low income seniors and people with disabilities. The SSI Exceptional Expense Supplement provides additional help for those with the highest care needs. The Homestead Credit delivers property tax relief to seniors on fixed incomes. SeniorCare remains one of the most affordable state-run prescription drug programs in the country. And Family Care, IRIS, and our Aging and Disability Resource Centers make Wisconsin a national leader in long-term care.</p> <p>As governor, I will work with the legislature, retiree advocates, organized labor, and the Department of Health Services to build out a stronger retirement security framework for Wisconsin's low-income seniors, which could include a state-sponsored income supplement targeted at older Wisconsinites whose retirement income falls into the gaps that federal SSI</p>

	<p>does not reach. Expansion could be paired with other proven tools that directly stretch a fixed retirement income: more generous Homestead Credit thresholds, a stronger retirement income tax exclusion, and continued investment in SeniorCare, energy assistance, and property tax relief.</p> <p>Wisconsin cannot replace Social Security, only Congress can secure its future, but Wisconsin's seniors should not have to wait on Washington for the security they have earned. That is the work I want to do as governor.</p>
Missy Hughes	<p>The constant attacks on Social Security by Republican politicians are shameful and we must protect these earned benefits. As Governor I'll use my office to push our elected officials in Washington to put aside political grandstanding and actually secure the future of Social Security. But we cannot rely on D.C. politicians to fix this problem, we need to act ourselves. That's why as Governor I would look for ways to provide state-sponsored supplemental income for elderly Wisconsinites.</p>

Access to affordable health insurance has become a major national crisis with the changes created by Trump's 2025 budget bill. The Affordable Care Act, Medicaid, and Medicare were all adversely impacted by the bill and all Wisconsinites depend on these programs for access to quality health care.

Question #3: As governor, what would you do to defend and support these essential programs? Would you be willing to step forward with new more comprehensive or universal solutions to the health care needs of Wisconsinites?

Mandela Barnes	<p>When I'm Governor, I'll do everything we can to lower health care costs by expanding BadgerCare and passing a public option. Wisconsin is one of just ten states that still hasn't expanded Medicaid. Even Republican-led states have done it. But not Wisconsin. I will work with anyone to get this done. With a public option, we can lower costs by allowing Wisconsinites to buy into the state's BadgerCare program, forcing private companies to lower costs by being forced to compete with an efficient and affordable health care system. This is the boldest action we can take at the state level to bring down the cost of health care and get more Wisconsinites insured. I will also work to ensure our rural hospitals are protected and stay open in the face of Trump's Medicaid cuts, which we can bolster by expanding BadgerCare and increasing our Medicaid reimbursement rates which rank among the lowest in the Midwest. Additionally, we need to create a regulatory board to ensure our hospitals are not gouging Wisconsin families and have clear, transparent pricing. When I'm Governor, I'll do everything I can to lower the cost of healthcare for Wisconsin families—especially our seniors.</p>
Kelda Roys	<p>Health care is a right and we should not ration it based on your job, age, or wealth. I believe in a single payer, Medicare for All system – but I'm running for Governor, not Congress, so I can't deliver that. Instead, I have a plan to get us closer to universal coverage that is actually achievable in Wisconsin. KeldaCare opens up the state employee health plan, the same insurance I enjoy as a senator, to allow anyone to buy in to high quality, comprehensive, competitively priced, nonprofit coverage – individuals, small businesses, unions, school districts. This plan does not rely on funding or permission from the Trump regime, and as we expand coverage, we will save taxpayer dollars and lower premiums for everyone by reducing uncompensated care, expanding the risk pool, and ensuring that the doors of rural clinics and hospitals stay open. With the savings, we may be able to offer state subsidies to allow more individuals to buy in directly or via the ACA exchange as a public option. I also support offering BadgerCare as another public option, if we can get a waiver from the Trump administration.</p>

	<p>It's important to recognize that Medicaid expansion, which I fought hard for Wisconsin to do for the last 15 years, is now off the table: Trump and Tiffany's OBBBA has made it infeasible for Wisconsin and other non-expansion states to expand Medicaid right now, unfortunately. Their budget is also pushing healthcare out of reach for many Wisconsinites with the loss of ACA expanded subsidies and devastating cuts to Medicaid and Medicare.</p> <p>We need to tackle costs by capping prices on common procedures, as Oregon and Indiana are successfully doing. I've authored many bills to cut prescription drug costs and as governor will join with neighboring states to boost purchasing power for vaccines and other drugs, and rebuild our broken public health infrastructure. I will create an Office of Insurance Investigation at OCI to crack down on wrongful denials, cap copays for insulin, asthma and diabetes meds, require coverage of OTC contraception and end discriminatory reimbursement practices, establish a state prescription drug purchasing board, stop surprise billing, and further reform PBMs to protect patients. You can read my full plans for investing in the healthcare workforce, protecting reproductive rights, and mental and behavioral health, at keldaroys.com/keldacare</p>
<p>David Crowley</p>	<p>Healthcare is not a privilege for those who can afford it. It is a fundamental right, and as Governor I will govern like I believe that.</p> <p>My 30-Day Plan includes opening BadgerCare as a public option for every Wisconsin family, doubling eligibility and creating a real public alternative to for-profit insurance. Removing insurance industry middlemen from BadgerCare is common sense reform that saves money and improves care coordination. We should have done it years ago.</p> <p>I will use every tool available to crack down on pharmaceutical price gouging. No Wisconsin family should have to choose between their medication and their rent. As Governor I will use the full leverage of state purchasing power to demand fair prices for prescription drugs.</p> <p>I am committed to shifting Wisconsin from a sick care system to a genuine public health model. As County Executive I helped drive a 30% reduction in opioid overdose deaths and brought in over \$100 million in state and federal healthcare funding by investing in prevention, mobile outreach, and coordinated crisis response. My plan to make Wisconsin the healthiest state in the Midwest by 2035 scales statewide, with behavioral health urgent care clinics, mobile crisis teams, and mental health navigators in all 72 counties.</p> <p>On hospital accountability in underserved communities and rate regulation, I am committed to ensuring every Wisconsin family has access to quality care regardless of zip code and will review all available policy tools to deliver that outcome.</p> <p>I believe every Wisconsinite deserves access to quality, affordable care and I will pursue every available tool to get there.</p>
<p>Francesca Hong</p>	<p>My healthcare platform is extensive and comprehensive. The Trump tax cuts will devastate Medicaid and Affordable Care Act financing, and preparing a state response to mitigate the damage is a life-or-death issue for over a million Wisconsinites.</p> <p>My response to Medicaid is twofold: one, mitigating work requirement regulations and making benefit programs as accessible to enrollees as possible; two, identifying savings opportunities across our healthcare spending and reinvesting it in Medicaid to help small and rural providers weather the storm.</p>

	<p>Even post-OBBBA, expanding Medicaid fully would yield ~\$420–\$450m per biennium because of changes to federal matching funds over Wisconsin’s clunky Walker-era “partial” Medicaid expansion. We also have extortionate healthcare prices in Wisconsin — healthcare costs are high because healthcare prices are high — and can follow the lead of states like Indiana, surprisingly, by bringing the most egregiously inflated prices from massive healthcare corporations in line with the fair market. Large nonprofit hospitals receive an amount in tax breaks greater than their investment in community care that’s so large it could cover half of all rural hospital losses — we will compel them to invest in their communities or lose their nonprofit status. In partnership with the Legislature and the Attorney General, I believe we can help staunch the bleeding of smaller facility closures — which bring costs up — by developing aggressive antimonopoly toolkits. I would also commission a study to determine where and how we can save money long-term by bringing in-house state services that are currently contracted out — like Medicaid MCOs. Savings from these initiatives and more can be reinvested into Medicaid reimbursements to prevent Trump’s cuts from completely debilitating the program.</p> <p>We must work to mitigate the tremendous administrative burden Trump’s bill places on Medicaid recipients. While Wisconsin has invested admirably in streamlining benefit enrollments, there’s lots of work that can be done — low-lift reforms like reusing eligibility documents across multiple programs and higher-lift efforts like hiring community navigators to proactively reach out to people and help them through the enrollment process.</p> <p>The BadgerCare Public Option, now a mainstay of Democratic legislators, has the potential to be an aggressive response to Affordable Care Act cuts. By consolidating purchasing power between a public option open to individuals and all employers, including the self-employed, and the state employee insurance plan, we can provide a counterweight to healthcare prices; that difference should yield lower premium growth and provide a basis for plan subsidies.</p> <p>Ultimately, only a federal Medicare for All program can address issues of cost, coverage, and utilization. I’m not sure that’s attainable at the state level (for logistical and constitutional reasons, not political will). However, as individual people and as a state, we desperately need the program, and I will use my platform to champion it at every opportunity.</p>
<p>Sara Rodriguez</p>	<p>Health care has been my life's work. First as a nurse at the bedside, then as a public health leader, and now as Lieutenant Governor. I have seen what it looks like when a family loses coverage, when a rural hospital closes, when a senior has to choose between groceries and prescriptions, and when a young mother delays prenatal care because she cannot afford it.</p> <p>The 2025 federal budget bill made every one of those situations more likely, and Wisconsinites should understand that we have not yet felt the worst of it. The law deliberately structured the deepest Medicaid cuts, the new work-reporting requirements, the six-month eligibility redeterminations, and the harshest provider tax restrictions to take effect after the 2026 midterm elections. The pain is coming, and it is coming on a delay specifically designed to keep voters from connecting the cuts to the politicians who voted for them.</p> <p>The Wisconsin Department of Health Services estimates the changes to ACA tax credits will ultimately push roughly 270,000 Wisconsinites off their health insurance and cost our state more than \$142 million a year in new administrative burden alone. The expiration of the enhanced ACA premium tax credits at the end of 2025 has already driven marketplace premiums up an average of roughly 75 percent for 2026, and that is only the first wave.</p>

	<p>As governor, defending these programs and the people who rely on them will be a top priority. That starts with finally expanding and protecting BadgerCare. Wisconsin is one of only ten states that has not adopted Medicaid expansion, and the only one in the Midwest. Expansion would extend BadgerCare Plus coverage to roughly 95,800 additional Wisconsinites.</p> <p>Just as importantly, I will pass a Wisconsin Health Care Bill of Rights to enshrine core protections directly into state law so they cannot be rolled back by Congress or the courts: permanent protections for people with pre-existing conditions, an end to lifetime and annual coverage limits, an end to surprise medical billing, and stronger hospital financial assistance requirements. I will also codify Roe v. Wade into Wisconsin law and protect access to miscarriage care, ectopic pregnancy care, and fertility treatment, so that fundamental reproductive health care does not depend on the next election or the next court ruling. And I will continue to build on bipartisan progress like the recently signed law extending postpartum BadgerCare coverage from 60 days to 12 months, push back on red-tape work requirements that strip coverage from people who are already working, and protect SeniorCare and its national-leading prescription drug benefits.</p> <p>Wisconsin is also ready for a more comprehensive solution, and as governor I will launch BadgerChoice — a Wisconsin-governed public health insurance option built for the people our current system has priced out. Farmers, small business owners, early retirees, young adults, and anyone caught between job-based coverage and Medicare will be able to buy in. BadgerChoice will use Wisconsin's combined bargaining power to negotiate lower prices for prescription drugs, hospital care, and mental health services, while preserving the choice for anyone who prefers their current plan to keep it.</p> <p>A real plan also has to confront the affordability and access problems that hit hardest in this state. My plan will require that insurance covers mental health and substance-use care the same way it covers physical care, and give the state real authority to hold insurers accountable when they deny or delay that care, while expanding crisis intervention, adolescent mental health services, and substance-use treatment.</p> <p>I will also work with the legislature to establish a Rural Health Stabilization Fund to keep emergency rooms, maternity wards, and behavioral health services open in the parts of Wisconsin where the next closest hospital can be an hour away, expanding telehealth and mobile crisis services, and ensuring fair reimbursement so providers can keep their doors open.</p> <p>Health care is not a privilege. It is the foundation everything else in a person's life depends on. As governor, I will defend the programs Wisconsinites have paid into and earned, expand BadgerCare, lock fundamental protections into state law, build a Wisconsin-grown public option that gives every family a path to affordable coverage, and work with anyone willing to make our health care system work better for the people we serve.</p>
<p>Missy Hughes</p>	<p>Yes, as Governor I would create a universal public option system so that every Wisconsin family can have access to the health insurance they need. In addition to this public option I would expand BadgerCare so low-income Wisconsinites have the access they deserve, and invest in care deserts in rural and underserved communities.</p>

Numerous health care and retiree bills were circulated in the State Legislature this past year.

Question #4: What is your position on AB 62 (Lowering Health Care Costs Omnibus) and AB 482 (Allowing local ordinances requiring paid family or medical leave)?

Mandela Barnes	<p>I support both AB 62 and AB 482, and when I'm Governor I'll deliver both lower healthcare and prescription drug costs, as well as paid family leave. Through my plan to expand BadgerCare and provide a public option, we can bring down healthcare costs that Republicans like Tom Tiffany have sent skyrocketing. By providing a public option and letting families buy into BadgerCare, we can give families an efficient, affordable healthcare plan and create competition that lowers costs for those with private insurance. I support bringing down the costs of prescription drugs by taking on the middleman like pharmacy benefit managers and allowing the state to negotiate directly with drug companies for cheaper medicine. On paid leave, I'm deeply proud of my work as a community organizer in Milwaukee where I helped win paid leave for the City of Milwaukee. Unfortunately, it was preempted by Republicans at the state level and was overturned shortly after which is exactly why we need action at the state level. We need a statewide paid leave policy that ensures small business owners and their employees can take the time they need for their health and their families.</p>
Kelda Roys	<p>In the senate, I was a lead voice pushing to make the introduction of this legislation a Day One priority in January 2025. I fully support this omnibus because no one should have to choose between paying for their medication and paying their rent.</p> <p>ALL Wisconsinites — no matter your gender or work situation, should be able to access a minimum of 12 weeks of paid leave to bond with a new baby or adopted child, to recover from illness, or to take time off to care for an ill or dying loved one. That includes allowing municipalities to implement their own paid family and medical leave programs.</p> <p>As governor, I will implement a robust paid family and medical leave program. I was one of the first authors of paid family leave in Wisconsin over 15 years ago, when I was in the Assembly.</p> <p>In addition, I was the Democratic lead and champion for years on the APRN Modernization bill, which expands healthcare access for underserved communities and populations, by allowing advanced nurse practitioners to practice to the full extent of their training. This will lower costs and increase availability of healthcare for Wisconsinites, especially for seniors living in rural areas. I was also proud to be named the Palliative Care Association's legislator of the year for my work to create a palliative care council.</p>
David Crowley	<p>I strongly support the goals behind AB 62 because lowering health care costs has to be a top priority for Wisconsin families. People are paying too much for prescriptions, premiums, and basic care, and we need a comprehensive approach to bring those costs down. As Governor, I would push to build on efforts like AB 62 by increasing transparency, holding down prescription drug prices, and making sure insurers and providers are accountable. Any reform needs to deliver real savings and expand access, not just shift costs around.</p> <p>I also strongly support AB 482 because local communities should have the ability to lead, especially when it comes to something as fundamental as paid family and medical leave. No one should have to choose between a paycheck and caring for a new child, a sick family member, or their own health. Allowing local governments to adopt these policies is a step forward, but I believe we ultimately need a statewide standard so every worker in Wisconsin has access to paid leave.</p>

	<p>At the end of the day, both of these proposals point to a larger truth that we need to do more to support working families. As Governor, I'll fight for policies that lower costs, expand access to care, and ensure workers have the basic protections they deserve, because a stronger, healthier workforce means a stronger Wisconsin.</p>
Francesca Hong	<p>I was a coauthor of AB 62 and support AB 482. In addition, I am the author of 2023 AB 1156, a universal paid leave bill that includes family and medical leave.</p>
Sara Rodriguez	<p>I support the goals of AB 62, which carries forward the recommendations of Governor Evers's 2019 Task Force on Reducing Prescription Drug Prices. As a nurse, I have stood across from patients, many of them seniors on fixed incomes, who were forced to cut pills in half, skip doses, or stretch insulin to make a prescription last. AB 62 helps address the costs that put seniors in that position. The \$35 monthly insulin cap would protect older Wisconsinites with diabetes from a market that has driven a life-sustaining medication out of reach. Eliminating prescription drug cost-sharing under BadgerCare removes a barrier for low-income seniors, including many dual-eligibles. The Office of Prescription Drug Affordability and the Prescription Drug Affordability Review Board would give Wisconsin a real seat at the table when manufacturers raise prices. The 340B protections preserve a critical lifeline for rural seniors and low-income communities who depend on federally qualified health centers and critical access hospitals.</p> <p>As governor, I would advance legislation like this and build on it through the Wisconsin Health Care Bill of Rights and BadgerChoice.</p> <p>I support the goals of AB 482, which would repeal the 2011 state preemption that voids local family and medical leave ordinances. That preemption was passed for one reason: to nullify a paid sick leave ordinance nearly 70 percent of Milwaukee voters had approved at the ballot box. In the fifteen years since, more than a dozen other states have enacted statewide paid family and medical leave programs. This matters for seniors, too. Adult children caring for aging parents, grandparents stepping in to care for grandchildren, and older workers managing their own serious health conditions all need leave protections that current law does not guarantee. AB 482 imposes no new mandate on any employer. It restores the authority of cities, villages, towns, and counties to decide what works for their own workforces and families.</p> <p>As governor I would advance legislation like it and continue pushing for a statewide paid family and medical leave program so no Wisconsinite has to choose between their health, their family, and their paycheck.</p>
Missy Hughes	<p>I supported AB 62 and AB482, and as Governor, with a trifecata, I will push to see them passed next year. In particular we must cap out-of-pocket costs for insulin, a drug that hundreds of thousands of Wisconsinites need, and other prescriptions for chronic conditions.</p>

Question #5: What other public policy or legislative initiatives would you pursue to bring retirement security, including health security, to the greatest number of Wisconsin citizens?

Mandela Barnes	<p>Unions built Wisconsin and provided so many families—including my parents and grandparents—with good-paying jobs that provided dignity and comfort, along with a strong retirement plan. Unfortunately, the former Governor Scott Walker took a sledgehammer to workers rights and left so many Wisconsin families worse off than in the workplace than how our parents and grandparents have been treated. As a state legislator and Lieutenant Governor, I’ve always fought to ensure every worker in Wisconsin has the protections and rights they need to earn a fair paycheck and provide for their families. As Governor, no one will fight harder to restore the rights stripped away under Scott Walker—including repealing Act 10 and ensuring that every union in our state has the full right to organize and collectively bargain. I’ll fight to lower costs and get things done the Wisconsin Way, which includes freezing utility rates and taking on the greedy monopolies that continue to gouge our families. Our rates are some of the highest in the Midwest—Wisconsinites are going without food and prescriptions just to be able to afford their utility bills. That’s why I will freeze the rates as Governor and lower energy costs, giving our seniors real relief. Additionally, I will fight to protect our seniors' financial security by stopping online scammers who look to take advantage of our most vulnerable.</p>
Kelda Roys	<p>All policies are intertwined in the ways they can and should serve people across the state. The core issues of this campaign are resisting this authoritarian regime and helping Wisconsinites weather Trump’s affordability crisis. We need leaders with moral clarity to speak out against Trump’s abuses, protect our rights and freedoms, and hold his regime legally accountable. I have detailed plans to address the affordability crisis with concrete policies to raise the minimum wage and restore collective bargaining rights, while lowering costs on big ticket items like health care, housing, child care, and utilities. Having served on the state’s budget-writing committee, I am keenly aware of solutions and strategies Republicans have refused to pursue.</p> <p>Most importantly, I have the experience and political courage to actually use power to make the transformational changes we need. I’ve had 25 years of passing progressive policies in the toughest legislative environments, as a legislator, attorney, nonprofit executive, and small business owner. We need a governor who is willing and able to use political power to get things done, especially on economic security, healthcare, and cost of living.</p>
David Crowley	<p>Strengthening health and retirement security requires a coordinated strategy that reduces costs, expands access, and builds long term stability. I believe Wisconsin could explore establishing opt-in enrollment retirement savings programs for workers without employer-sponsored plans, paired with low fees and portable accounts. Expanding access to defined benefit style options or hybrid models can further stabilize retirement outcomes. At the same time, policies like enhanced Social Security supplements at the state level, targeted tax credits for low and middle income savers, and protections for pensions will ensure people can rely on consistent income in retirement.</p> <p>On the healthcare front, the most immediate impact on seniors comes from lowering costs and expanding coverage. Medicaid expansion, a state-based public option like that in my Badger Basics, and lowering prescription drug prices can significantly reduce out-of-pocket expenses, which is one of the biggest threats to retirement security. Investing in preventive care, community health centers, and rural health infrastructure helps people stay healthier longer, therefore reducing long term costs.</p>

	<p>There is also a critical intersection between health and financial stability. Policies that support long term care, including caregiver tax credits and expanded home and community based services, help families avoid catastrophic expenses. Paid family and medical leave ensures workers don't have to drain savings during a family health crisis.</p> <p>Finally, expanding affordable housing for seniors, strengthening property tax relief, improving transportation access, and supporting food security programs all reduce financial pressure in retirement. The most effective approach is a comprehensive one which builds savings early, protects income in retirement, and aggressively lowers the cost of staying healthy.</p>
<p>Francesca Hong</p>	<p>Health security means investing in healthcare before it becomes a crisis. I support the creation of a preventive care workforce that brings social workers and nurses into communities to help people treat conditions before they become severe — an investment that pays off in both long-term medical utilization, personal healthcare costs, and quality of life.</p> <p>I am the second author on 2025 AB 1221, which would create publicly owned grocery stores and place them in areas where Wisconsinites are unable to purchase affordable healthy food. There are huge swaths of our state where people on limited or fixed incomes are restricted to unhealthy or unaffordable food options which compounds into health concerns and lower quality of life.</p> <p>I support meaningful investment into and reconfiguration of our disability care programs. Many seniors and people with disabilities prefer to receive care at home a solution more affordable for both the state and the individual. I will reformulate IRIS to ensure both that home health aides receive living wages which helps ensure that home health care quality is reliable while protecting hour allocations of IRIS recipients.</p>
<p>Sara Rodriguez</p>	<p>There are several proven and emerging policies from other states that I would want to explore as governor that could expand retirement and health security for Wisconsinites:</p> <p>A Wisconsin Caregiver Tax Credit. Oklahoma, Nebraska, Georgia, Missouri, New Jersey, and others now offer state tax credits to family members caring for aging or disabled loved ones. Wisconsin's hundreds of thousands of family caregivers provide billions of dollars in unpaid care each year and save our Medicaid system enormous costs; they deserve real support.</p> <p>A Long-Term Care Affordability Strategy. Wisconsin's middle-income seniors are squeezed. Too "wealthy" for Medicaid but unable to afford \$100,000-a-year skilled care. There are models worth studying alongside expanded home and community-based services and serious investment in our direct-care workforce, which I have seen up close as a nurse and which is the foundation everything else in our long-term care system depends on.</p> <p>Medical Debt Relief and Protection. Wisconsin could use modest state and philanthropic funds to retire medical debt for lower-income residents, ban medical debt from credit reports, and strengthen hospital financial assistance requirements. A</p> <p>Wisconsin Reinsurance Program. State reinsurance program elsewhere have lowered ACA marketplace premiums by 10–20 percent. Wisconsin operated a small reinsurance program briefly in 2018 with bipartisan support, and it is a tool worth considering putting back to work for the early retirees and others who buy coverage on their own.</p> <p>Stronger Elder Financial Exploitation Protections. Older Wisconsinites lose tens of millions of dollars every year to fraud,</p>

	scams, and financial abuse. As governor, I will work with the Attorney General, financial institutions, banks and credit unions, and aging advocates to strengthen reporting, investigation, and prosecution of these crimes.
Missy Hughes	It is not talked about nearly enough, but with RFK's cuts to critical research we are getting further away from solving diseases like Alzheimer's that affect countless Wisconsin families each year. Our Universities have been central to decades of medical progress, and if the federal government won't support this research, we must.