

Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker, beloved by the Tea Party and the Koch brothers, has turned the Badger State into a right-wing petri dish for extremist ideas that disempower workers, depress the economy, and degrade women. When he's not trampling on the rights of public employees, Walker's imposing drastic limits on reproductive freedom, slashing education budgets, and indulging in pay-to-play politics that reward his friends and punish his enemies.

Wisconsin is ready for more progressive leadership — and polls show Democrat Mary Burke is a serious threat to Walker. If she wins, she'll be the state's first woman governor. EMILY's List spoke with Burke about her career in business and campaign for governor.



Mary Burke (center) is running to be Wisconsin's first woman governor.

You've had a very successful private sector career. Why do you want to be governor?

Because I love Wisconsin, and I want to make sure we have leadership that brings people together. Right now we have leaders who put politics ahead of what's best for the people. I'm a fourth-generation Wisconsinite, and I'm reminded every day of the values I grew up with. I live in a house that my grandfather, who was a mailman, delivered mail to. I have deep roots here. Wisconsinites, whether they're newly arrived or sixth generation, share these same values of fairness and opportunity. And how we address their concerns — how we make sure people have economic and educational opportunities — is important.

How has your background shaped your perspective on public service?

I think I have the perfect background to be governor — a business background, experience leading a state agency, and a commitment to improving education and closing the achievement gap. We desperately need all those things to move Wisconsin forward.

Almost nine years ago, I left Trek to help the Boys and Girls Club raise money to build a new building. Then I became state secretary of commerce and immediately put to use my skills to make government work better. I introduced the principles of continuous improvement — streamlining operations to be more effective — and accountability. I've served on the school board for two years and am passionate about education, so I pushed for a public-private partnership to close the achievement gap. Now we have 650 kids in the AVID/TOPS program and 100 who have graduated and are in college.

Do you agree that Wisconsin is the most polarized state in the country?

We are very polarized, but that doesn't reflect who we are as people. Wisconsin in the last seven presidential elections has voted for the Democratic candidate. We are more purple,

but this divide is not normal and has been caused by Governor Walker. With Act 10 [which limits collective bargaining rights for public employees], he divided people. I would have negotiated firmly but fairly for needed changes. In the private sector, the goal is to come to the table and leave the negotiations stronger and more united than before. That's a very different approach than Walker has taken.

Polls indicate this will be a close race. But Walker has a financial advantage. What do you need to do to compete with a powerful incumbent?

I expect to be outspent — but what's important is to raise enough to get our message out. I'm putting in my own resources, but it will be a fraction of what's needed. I cannot self-fund, so it's important to raise money. I had a strong showing in the first 12 weeks of my campaign, and I believe I can get the support I need within the state and nationally to get my message out.

On the road with EMILY ...

Check out our calendar of upcoming events to see when we're in a city near you. Visit www.emilyslist.org/events to learn more or reserve your place.

POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY PROGRAM (POP) TRAININGS

- March 15 ■ Lael Stegall Candidate Training, Portland, ME
- March 15 ■ Albuquerque, NM
- March 27 ■ Salt Lake City, UT
- March 29 ■ Chicago, IL
- May 24 ■ Minneapolis, MN

WE ARE EMILY CELEBRATION

Honoring Senators Dianne Feinstein & Barbara Boxer

- April 29 ■ Program & Dinner, Washington, DC
- April 30 ■ Breakfast & Briefing, Washington, DC

REGIONAL EVENTS

- May 30 ■ Chicago, IL (Conference)
- June 2 ■ Dallas, TX (Reception)
- August 22 ■ San Francisco, CA (Conference)
- September 22 ■ New York, NY (Conference)

Why should someone in Iowa or California support your campaign for governor?

Wisconsin has been a swing state in presidential elections and will be again in 2016. And it's important who the governor is at that time. We also see more things happening at the state level because of the inactivity in Washington: measures to restrict women's freedom to make their own choices ... voter ID laws ... environmental protections being weakened ... education budgets and programs that lift people out of poverty being gutted. Very important, meaningful issues are being fought at the state level. And as politicians in other states see these things happening in Wisconsin — which is a moderate state — they see it as a blueprint and pass similar initiatives that move us all backward.

Describe the effect EMILY's List support has had on your campaign.

EMILY's List has been a great partner in my campaign. I can't say enough about the member support and the involvement. It's an organization that I've come to view as a true partner in my campaign — bringing not only financial resources, but also the type of expertise that candidates need to be successful.

What advice would you give a young woman interested in public service?

Definitely do it! It's a way to have an important role in the community at any level. I ran for school board because I care passionately about education, but whether it's the school board or city council or governor or president — do it. I have not once regretted leaving the private sector and business — even though I loved business. It's in my blood; my dad was an entrepreneur, and I still mentor a small business. But since I left, I've found an incredible amount of fulfillment in public service. The issues are so important to people, and women have an important perspective that needs to be represented. ■