

## EXCLUSIVE: Close Wisconsin Trump Ally Likely To Enter GOP Race For Governor; Who Will Trump Endorse?

By Mark Belling, WISN-AM

The first local government official in Wisconsin to endorse Donald Trump for President in 2016 is about to enter what is likely to be a fierce fight for the Republican nomination for Governor. It's possible he will have Trump's endorsement. If so, the race may swing sharply.

Thiensville Village President Van Mobley, a grassroots conservative, is planning to join frontrunner Rebecca Kleefisch and challenger Kevin Nicholson in the race. Mobley would seemingly have little chance against the much better funded and much more well known Kleefisch and Nicholson unless----and this is the giant UNLESS---he has the endorsement of Trump. Trump's endorsement has swung numerous GOP primaries the last several years and my guess is it is worth about 30 percentage points in a Wisconsin GOP primary. If Mobley gets it, and Trump comes to Wisconsin to campaign for him, he's a major player.

But that's a big IF. While Trump values loyalty and Mobley was the lone official in the state to endorse Trump when running against 16 other Republicans in the 2016 race, the reality is that Mobley heads a government in a very small community. Thiensville is a doughnut-like village entirely surrounded by the much larger City of Mequon. He has very little name recognition outside Ozaukee County.

Kleefisch, on the other hand, is the presumptive front runner based on serving eight years as Lieutenant Governor and has been endorsed by much of the state's GOP power structure. She is also supported by billionaire Diane Hendricks of Beloit, one of the wealthiest women in the world and one of the largest GOP donors in the country.

Nicholson has strengths too. He carried 55 counties in his unsuccessful 2018 GOP primary campaign for the US Senate. He has raised his profile by running the grassroots No Better Friend Corporation. He has received millions in past support from Uline Corporation's Dick and Liz Uihlein. The Uihliens and Hendricks are two of the most important Republican donors in the country.

Kleefisch both benefits from and suffers from her affiliation with former Governor Scott Walker. Some Republicans, including those formerly allied with former Governor Tommy Thompson, felt frozen out during the Walker era. Then there's the Trump issue. Like many Republicans (including me), Kleefisch was initially harshly dismissive of Trump. It's fair to say that many of Trump's most loyal supporters don't trust her.

Others have talked about running, including Thompson. But that seems far fetched. Madison developer Eric Hovde keeps telling people he wants to run and he has personal wealth to finance a campaign. But it's hard to imagine somebody from Madison gaining the trust of a state GOP voter base that is repelled by the Madison gang that has disastrously mismanaged the state GOP for years.

A few other little known candidates are running but it is being charitable to say their chances of winning are tiny.

The wild card is Trump. He urged former northern Wisconsin Congressman Sean Duffy to enter the race and Duffy probably would have won had he done it. But Duffy passed and is widely believed to be planning to run against Democratic Senator Tammy Baldwin in 2024. It's also hard to see Trump sitting it out. Wisconsin has produced some of Trump's largest rallies and if he held one in late July or early August, right before the GOP primary, it would draw a massive crowd. Would he endorse Kleefisch? I doubt it. Nicholson? Maybe, but only if he thinks Nicholson has a chance to beat Kleefisch. What about a Trump endorsement of Mobley?

That would change everything.

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