

EXCLUSIVE: Wisconsin's Tim Michels Was Offered Cabinet Position That Went To Fellow Badger Sean Duffy

By Mark Belling, WISN-AM

Former Wisconsin Governor candidate Tim Michels, a co-owner of his family's massive infrastructure business, was offered the position of Secretary of Transportation in the Trump administration before the position ultimately went to fellow Wisconsinite Sean Duffy.

The behind the scenes developments were confirmed to me by two Republican insiders and confirmed on the record by Michels. The deal-breaker was a demand by Trump transition team members that Michels divest of his ownership interest in Michels Corporation as the firm is involved in many highway and infrastructure projects that ultimately could be financed in part with the very federal funds the US DOT administers. Given Michels' massive stake in the firm, whose valuation is in the range of \$4 billion, divestment would have been a major complication for his and his family's finances.

Michels, according to sources, was so close to accepting the position that he and his family met with Trump and transition team members this past weekend at Mar-a-Lago. Elon Musk, who is deeply involved in the transition, was one of the people who met with Michels.

With Michels unable to accept the position, behind the scenes lobbying on an alternative was intense. Michels personally backed Duffy as did Reince Priebus, the first chief of staff in Trump's first term. Priebus remains close to Trump and is also advising the transition team. Priebus, like Michels and Duffy, pressed hard for Duffy.

Duffy has been an outspoken Trump supporter since his resignation from Congress and has frequently appeared on cable news programs defending Trump. Duffy represented northern Wisconsin in the US House for a decade and state GOP leaders have repeatedly tried to persuade him to re-enter politics by running for Governor of Wisconsin. In addition, Duffy's wife, Rachel Campos-Duffy, is co-host of the weekend edition of Fox and Friends on Fox News Channel and is likewise a major Trump booster and extremely popular in GOP circles.

Michels tells me Duffy has his full support. Michels confirmed the gist of this story with me.

While immigration and inflation have been among Trump's top priorities, he has repeatedly stressed the need to rebuild the country's infrastructure by focusing on traditional projects like highways, bridges, rail and airports and not on the "green" initiatives that received massive funding during the Biden administration.

It is possible Michels will end up in a different Trump role on some type of advisory committee or commission where his financial interests are not a potential conflict. Trump's team is in the process of filling thousands of positions as they attempt to remake the federal bureaucracy and disempower bureaucratic lifers. Trump backed Michels in the 2022 GOP primary for governor.

There may be more Wisconsinites on the mix as the buildout of the Trump administration continues. The same GOP sources in on the Duffy and Michels matter tell me that former Governor Tommy Thompson may be interested in an administration role. Another figure to watch is Waukesha County's Brian Dorow, a major player in the Department of Homeland Security in Trump's first term and an ally of Tom Homan, Trump's designated border czar.

One Trump supporter who won't be getting a federal job is Senator Ron Johnson. Because of the narrow GOP majority in the Senate, Trump can't afford to lose the Wisconsin senate seat in a special election that would be forced by Johnson's resignation. So Johnson is staying in the Senate with a higher profile than ever.

In addition, Fond du Lac County District Attorney Eric Toney is a likely favorite for US Attorney for Eastern Wisconsin and Waukesha County Judge Jennifer Dorow (Brian Dorow's wife) will get strong consideration for the first vacant federal judgeship in Wisconsin, although there is no guarantee one of those posts will open up.

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