



Summary of Gubernatorial Candidate Responses

Updated July 19, 2026

The WDDP Gubernatorial Candidate Forum Series offered community members the opportunity to meet each Democratic candidate for Wisconsin state governor, one person at a time. We asked each candidate the same four standard questions about protecting democracy and democratic institutions, and their responses are summarized in the tables below. (The remainder of each session was open to questions from the audience, so questions and topics varied from candidate to candidate.) Candidates are listed in the order they appeared at the Series, which took place between April 20 and June 18.

Here are brief biographical sketches of the candidates, primarily taken from The Wisconsin State Journal, June 3, 2026:

Francesca Hong, 36, a member of the state Assembly's Democratic Socialist caucus, has served in the lower chamber since 2021 and was the first Asian American to be elected to the Legislature. Before entering politics, she was a chef, small business owner, and community organizer.

Joel Brennan, 56, served as Secretary of the state Department of Administration from 2019 through early 2022, playing a major role in the state budget process. Previously, he ran Discovery World, the state's largest science museum. Most recently, he served as president of the Greater Milwaukee Committee.

Mandela Barnes, 39, became Wisconsin's first Black lieutenant governor in 2018 and ran for U.S. Senate in 2022, losing to U.S. Senator Ron Johnson, R-Oshkosh, by one of the slimmest margins in decades. Since then, he has worked for nonprofits and launched his own political action committee to support young, diverse candidates.

Kelda Roys, 46, has served in the state Senate since 2021 and previously served a two-year term in the state Assembly, where she served as Democratic Caucus chair. An attorney and small-business owner, Roys ran for governor in 2018, losing to Evers in the Democratic primary.

David Crowley, 40, joined the state Assembly in 2017 and served until 2020, when he was elected Milwaukee County Executive, becoming the youngest county executive in county history and the first Black individual elected to the role.

Candidate Responses to **Campaign Finance** Question

(1) What actions will you take to reduce the influence of money in Wisconsin politics? (2) Will you personally commit to refusing contributions from SuperPacs, dark money organizations, and foreign influence PACs?		
<i>Candidate</i>	<i>Core Takeaways</i>	<i>Key points</i>
Francesca Hong	(1) Refused all corporate PAC money (2) Advocates for funding legislation	Promotes legislation to allow candidates to use campaign funds for living expenses, to enable working-class citizens to run for office
Joel Brennan	(1) Refused all corporate PAC money (2) Supports stronger campaign finance laws	Calls for • Greater transparency and disclosure of political spending • Stronger accountability • Limits on outside influence • Curbs on unlimited high-dollar donations
Mandela Barnes	(1) Money has come from grassroots donations (2) Advocates campaign finance reform	• Supports reforms to reduce big-money influence and close loopholes allowing unlimited donations • Supported by End Citizens United
Kelda Roys	(1) Refused all corporate PAC money (2) Supports structural reforms	Long-standing efforts to • Frame money in politics as a systemic problem • Enable stronger anti-gerrymandering protections through a constitutional amendment • Restore public financing
David Crowley	(1) Refused all money from businesses (2) Advocates for campaign finance reform	Supports • Stronger state campaign finance laws • Greater transparency in donations • Overturning Citizens United • Public campaign finance to reduce candidates' reliance on fundraising, allowing them to spend more time with constituents

Candidate Responses to **Election Integrity** Question

What steps will you take to reverse erosion in voter access and make sure that every eligible Wisconsinite can register, cast a ballot, and have that ballot counted?		
<i>Candidate</i>	<i>Core Message</i>	<i>Key points</i>
Francesca Hong	Put it in the state constitution	• Make it easy to access the ballot box • Lower the voting age to 16 • Automatic voter registration through DMV for folks who turn 18 • Expand the IDs that qualify at election sites
Joel Brennan	Maintain state control over elections	• Expand same-day voting, automatic voter registration, extended early in-person voting • Protect election workers and voting infrastructure • Prepare for emergency support (e.g., non-militarized National Guard) to ensure elections run smoothly
Mandela Barnes	Defend, protect, and expand existing voting access tools	• Authorize counting early votes sooner • Preserve same-day registration, early voting, vote-by-mail and drop boxes • Enable preregistration at age 16, automatic voter registration tied to driver's licenses, standardized student IDs across UW campuses • Ensure voting is not restricted or undermined by federal interference
Kelda Roys	Promote voter access and civic participation infrastructure	• Expand voting by mail and restore longer early voting • Expand the list of acceptable identification • Restore high school special registration deputies
David Crowley	Invest in election infrastructure	• Strengthen legal defenses, build rapid-response to counter misinformation • Supports early counting of absentee ballots, automatic voter registration for 18-year-olds, modernized equipment, and cybersecurity

Candidate Responses to **Immigration** Question

As governor, what will you do to protect immigrant communities and all Wisconsinites from potentially unlawful or harmful actions by ICE and CBP within our state?		
<i>Candidate</i>	<i>Core message</i>	<i>Key points</i>
Francesca Hong	Due process for all	• Require clear identification of federal agents, ban 287(g) agreements, block new detention centers, guarantee due process and legal support • Direct resources to support legal training, know-your-rights education, emergency assistance, community protection efforts
Joel Brennan	Establish accountability	• Block agents from entering schools, hospitals, courthouses, and places of worship • Pursue legal action with the Attorney General • Prevent local police from acting as agents of federal immigration enforcement • Establish a state accountability commission to review incidents, accept citizen documentation, and hold federal agents accountable when they violate state law.
Mandela Barnes	Increase state-level enforcement and legal action	• Challenge rogue ICE practices, and condemn masked raids and actions in schools, hospitals, and places of worship • Resist abusive federal orders • Empower the Department of Justice and the Attorney General's Office to investigate and prosecute actors who violate state law
Kelda Roys	Restore a system of fair constitutional law enforcement of our borders and immigration laws	• Hold ICE accountable under state law, and expand civil-rights avenues for residents • Restrict ICE operations, require agents to be unmasked and identifiable, prohibit 287(g) agreements, and block the use of Wisconsin facilities for detention or staging
David Crowley	Coordinated efforts are necessary	• Increase coordination among local law enforcement, local municipal partners, and nonprofits to provide legal-observer training, free legal information, rapid-response verification of raids, and civil-liberties protections • End 287(g) agreements and rein in sheriff authority • Protect immigrant communities as essential to Wisconsin

Candidate Responses to **Redistricting** Question

What concrete steps would you take as governor to establish and protect a fair, nonpartisan redistricting process in Wisconsin?		
<i>Candidate</i>	<i>Core Message</i>	<i>Key points</i>
Francesca Hong	Supports free maps, yet recognizes the need to defend representation	• Supports creating a permanent, nonpartisan commission to draw fair maps\ • Endorses creating an anti-gerrymandering amendment to the state constitution • Wants to use every tool to ensure every voice is heard
Joel Brennan	Establish maps that strengthen democracy	• Appoint a nonpartisan redistricting commission and ensure all models are online, available, and accessible to the public • Consider ranked-choice voting and other changes that disrupt unhealthy status-quo practices to protect broad voting access once maps are in place
Mandela Barnes	Supports fair maps, but recognizes the need to defend democracy	• Support nonpartisan redistricting • Advocate for nationwide fair-map standards • Act decisively if Wisconsin must protect democracy, including redrawing congressional maps
Kelda Roys	Supports fair maps, but must be ready to counter partisan manipulation	• Redraw congressional maps to reflect a 50-50 state • Develop a collaborative, transparent redistricting process, ensuring it is in place before the 2030 cycle • Pass a constitutional amendment banning partisan gerrymandering
David Crowley	Wisconsin must model nonpartisan redistricting rather than reacting to short-term political pressure	• Adopt a nonpartisan redistricting commission • Enshrine fair maps in the Constitution • Reject retaliatory gerrymandering, emphasizing that Wisconsin should not “match crazy with crazy”