



WisPolitics: Johnson jumps in Senate race to stop national health care

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By Kay Nolan
For WisPolitics

MILWAUKEE -- Oshkosh businessman Ron Johnson formally entered the GOP primary for the U.S. Senate this morning – his first attempt at any elected office – saying he was inspired to run in an effort to stop national health care.

“To me, nationalized health care is a real assault on our freedom,” Johnson said at a Milwaukee news conference, surrounded by family.

Without a free market system, he said, “We won't have the advances in medicine that we have had in the past; we won't have the advances in life-saving drugs. To me, that was the real trigger.”

Although he calls himself a lifelong conservative, Johnson said he's not into “labeling” and “hopes to reach out to everybody.” He said, for example, that as a small business owner, he's not against all government regulation.

“I'm a small business person. I'm not anti-government,” he said.

Johnson, who also had events later in Green Bay and Wausau, joins a GOP primary that already includes former Commerce Secretary Dick Leinenkugel, Madison developer Terrence Wall and Watertown businessman David Westlake. The winner of the September primary will advance to take on Dem Sen. Russ Feingold.

Wall said in a conference call with reporters today he believes it's too late for Johnson to enter the race, saying, “If you really cared about the future of this country, you would have been looking at this last fall.”

Wall said that not only does Johnson not have enough time to build a campaign to take on Feingold, but that he's missed the critical Lincoln Day season for local GOP affiliates throughout the state. Wall said he's visited some 60 counties so far in the campaign, hitting dozens of Lincoln Day events along the way.

“I do think it's going to be very difficult for any candidate to jump in the race this late,” Wall said. “You cannot replicate the Lincoln Day Dinner slate. ... Those groups of people are not going to be getting back together again.”

Johnson said he didn't know his GOP rivals well enough to discuss their differences and didn't mention Feingold other than to acknowledge Feingold's established financial support and that it would take a strong campaign to unseat him.

John Kraus, a senior adviser to Feingold's campaign, said Johnson's entrance into the race wouldn't have any impact on the Dem's approach to winning a fourth term. He also said none of the four Republican candidates have offered any plans to deal with the problems they see in Washington, D.C.

"They've got their slogans down. They've got their sound bites down. They've got their attacks down," Kraus said. "But none of them have put forward any solutions, none of them have put forward any plan on spending, jobs and the economy, health care, foreign policy, you name it, nothing."

Johnson, 55, is the owner and president of Oshkosh-based Pacur Inc., a manufacturer of plastic components for medical, commercial and industrial purposes that employs about 100 people in the Fox Valley area. He has never run for political office before, but started to gain some attention last fall after speaking at a Tea Party rally. He also spoke this spring at a rally on the state Capitol steps on Tax Day, railing against federal health care legislation.

While he has always thought of himself of conservative and has traditionally voted for GOP candidates, Johnson said he never was very much involved in politics before, and would be a true "citizen legislator" able to relate to the American people.

"We have enough professional politicians in Washington," he said.

Johnson lashed out at American politics in general, saying the nation needs transparency and honesty.

An accountant by training, Johnson said he believes the government has a role in regulating big banks. But he said the regulations in place failed by allowing banks to get too big to fail, saying they should have been broken up "in an orderly fashion."

Johnson also blamed politicians as much as banks for the nation's housing crisis and financial meltdown.

"Because we have politicians who are grotesquely irresponsible, we have a huge financial mess ahead of us," he said.

[Wall says Johnson too late to enter GOP field](#)



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