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Walker promises to be a 'fighter' as he formally kicks off presidential campaign

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WAUKESHA -- Gov. Scott Walker formally kicked off his long-anticipated campaign for the presidency Monday, promising to take nationwide his battles in Wisconsin fighting unions and other “big-government special interests.”

Walker also pledged to take the fight to those who threaten America’s safety around the globe and to stand up for the rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, religious freedoms, and for the “healthy or sick, born or unborn.”

“Americans deserve a president who will fight and win for them,” Walker declared during a rally at the Waukesha County Expo Center.

The line echoed a theme Walker, 47, has used recently to differentiate himself from other GOP contenders in an increasingly crowded field. Though Walker is now the 15th Republican to formally declare a run for the party’s presidential nomination, he has said some in the field have been good fighters but haven't won big battles, while others have won elections but haven't consistently taken on the big issues.

He addressed backers in the same building where he celebrated his June 2012 successful defeat of a recall attempt, an event that propelled him to national political prominence.

The governor reminded the crowd of his efforts to strip public employees in Wisconsin of most of their collective bargaining powers, a move that sparked the attempt to recall him.

And he sought to provide a sharp contrast to President Obama.

He pledged to repeal the Affordable Care Act and “out-of-control regulations that are like a wet blanket on the economy.” Walker also promised an “all-of-the-above” energy policy that includes approving the Keystone pipeline. He said he would push “power and money out of Washington and send it to our states and our schools” while lowering taxes.

To underscore his message on taxes, Walker recounted his shopping habits at Kohl’s -- a favorite line on the campaign trail -- but with a twist. As he often does, the governor said the company can thrive while offering customers deep

discounts on its merchandise because of the volume it sells. Walker argued the government should take the same approach by broadening the base and increasing the number of people participating in the economy.

Walker said that kind of plan, based on an idea called the Laffer Curve, worked under President Reagan.

“Today, I call it the ‘Kohl's Curve’ because I believe that you can spend your money far better than the government, and when we do, the economy will get a whole lot better,” he said.

Before Walker took the stage, his sons, Matt and Alex, joked their dad was a nerd who “still wears blue jean shorts and long white tube socks,” while Rachel Campos-Duffy, wife of U.S. Rep. Sean Duffy, took on likely Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton.

“Scott Walker loves to take long rides on his Harley,” shouted Campos-Duffy. “Hillary takes long rides in the back seat of her limo.”

She also charged, “While Scott Walker takes a brown bag lunch to work every day, Hillary just recently discovered fast food. She now goes to Chipotle Kardashian-style, with sunglasses, designer pants suits and an entourage.”

Campos-Duffy included former President Bill Clinton in her comments.

“Scott has been married to Tonette for 24 years,” she said. “Twenty-four is Bill Clinton’s favorite age.”

Walker’s sons said their dad has always been there for them and has taught them compassion. Tonette Walker exuded joy as she told the crowd, “Our family is excited to start this new adventure.”

Tonette told about how she had first met Walker at a restaurant and how he proposed to her – both times by scribbling a note on a napkin. “My first impression of the man I fell in love with and married was, ‘Scott Walker is a guy who goes after what he wants,’” she said.

Tonette Walker described her husband is a “loving husband, thoughtful father and a fearless leader.” She reminded the audience that he is a conservative and ended with, “I have no doubt he will build a better America.”

Lt. Gov. Rebecca Kleefisch drew a connection between Monday's event at Walker's victory in the recall election more than three years ago.

“Do you remember what it was like to see your governor persecuted?” she said before going on to describe the scene from that night.

Kleefisch talked about the protests that erupted in the state Capitol in 2012, shouting, “They came in planes and buses and trucks ... they wanted to be in the driver’s seat,” she said. “In a Herculean effort, like a David to a Goliath, Gov. Scott Walker had your back, and America, he will again.”

Making another Biblical reference, Kleefisch said she texted Walker on the night the recall was launched.

“I wrote in the words: Jeremiah 29:1,” she said, explaining that the Bible verse talks of the Lord providing prosperity and hope for the future. She said a few minutes later, her phone beeped.

“Scott had texted back: Isaiah 54:17,” Kleefisch said. “No weapon formed against you will prevail.”

State Sen. Leah Vukmir, R-Wauwatosa, also spoke of the past, recalling how she originally backed someone else when Walker ran for Milwaukee County Executive. “I realized I was supporting the wrong candidate,” she said. “He has won and he is going places. Next stop: 1600 Pennsylvania Ave.” She said she admires Walker for his “conservative principles.”

Ahead of his announcement, Dem officials warned Walker’s record in Wisconsin of a lagging economy and a decimated educational system bodes poorly for what his presidency would look like.

Democratic National Committee Vice-Chair RT Rybak, state Chair Martha Laning and state Rep. Mandela Barnes of Milwaukee blasted Walker hours ahead of his official presidential announcement.

“We want Americans to know just how disastrous he would be as a president,” Laning said. “Wisconsin has seen the largest shrinkage of middle class income in the nation, yet here he is today, announcing his candidacy for president of the United States.”

Barnes warned Walker’s plan for workers was to “work harder and make less money,” citing his support of a measure to allow workers to put in a seven-day week and the repeal of prevailing wage laws for local projects.

“I have first-hand experience in the Legislature with Gov. Scott Walker and let me tell you that Gov. Scott Walker does not care about working people. He does not care about our state’s future,” Barnes said. “Scott Walker cares simply about Scott Walker.”

-- *By Kay Nolan*
For WisPolitics.com