



Wisconsin Alliance for Retired Americans
Interview with David Crowley, candidate for Wisconsin Governor
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Ross Winklbauer: Hello, I'm Ross Winklbauer, President of the Wisconsin Alliance for Retired Americans. And I am pleased to welcome you to the Wisconsin Alliance for Retired Americans 2026 Wisconsin Gubernatorial Candidate Interview Series. Wisconsin is home to a rapidly growing older population.

Today, 1 in 5 in Wisconsin are over the age of 65. But over the next 4 years, that'll grow to 1 in 4. The decisions our next governor makes will have a significant impact on their health, financial security, and ability to live independently. This interview series gives voters an opportunity to hear directly from the candidates about how they would address the challenges facing older Wisconsinites. Each candidate has been invited to participate. Under the same format, and we'll be asked the same core questions.

And with that, I'd like to introduce Democratic gubernatorial Candidate County... Milwaukee County Executive David Crowley. Would you like to briefly introduce yourself?

David Crowley: Well, first and foremost, I want to say thank you, Ross, for having me on today. I want to say thank you to everybody who is also watching. My name is David Crowley. The most important title that I hold is a husband, always gotta give my three-quarters a better shout-out. But I'm also a girl dad times three. I spent seven years in the state capitol, so I know exactly how Madison worked. And for the past six years, I have been leading the largest county in the state of Wisconsin.

And when I look at this race, I think there's a lot of frustration. Not just frustrations with Republicans and who's occupying the White House, but also frustrations with our own party. And yes, we have been fighting back, but we haven't really communicated what we're fighting for, what the vision is that we need here in the state of Wisconsin, across this country. And so I'm in this race to bring more people to the table. I want to make sure that no one is no longer on the menu, and they actually have a seat to help craft many of the policies and lend their solutions that they believe is going to work for them. So I truly appreciate this opportunity.

Ross Winklbauer: Well, thank you, David. Why don't we just get into the questions?

David Crowley: Alright.

Ross Winklbauer: Wisconsin's population is growing... is growing fast. By 2030, we're talking 1.3 million plus residents 65 and over. And that generation leans hard on hospitals and health

services. Meanwhile, many Wisconsin hospitals are on the brink of closing, especially in rural areas where seniors don't have a backup option. As governor, what would you actually do to help Wisconsin hospitals financially afloat, so older adults and everyone else can still get emergency care, inpatient treatment, and basic health services without having to drive an hour to find it.

David Crowley: You know, this is one of the things that I hear as I travel across the state. We have not only seen hospitals closing, but clinics closing, and people are falling through the cracks because they can't actually get to the hospital systems.

And so, I am proposing in our Badger Basics plan that we actually expand BadgerCare. But you also have to couple that with increasing the reimbursement rates. One, by expanding BadgerCare will double the amount of people who can actually get access to this system, and it's one of the best programs that we have in the state of Wisconsin, so we need to build on that existing system. And we need to make sure it's comprehensive, not just focusing on, you know, physical health, but mental, vision, as well as dental, so folks can get that comprehensive care.

But we also have to incentivize providers to become a part of this network, so no one falls through the cracks or have to travel 1 to 2 or 3 hours away, and we see this happening already. And so, by increasing the reimbursement rates, that helps to incentivize more providers to enter, but it also makes sure that we're taking care of our workforce as well within healthcare.

I think about, you know, those... the family caregivers, I think about home-based caregivers. how they're getting paid pennies on the dollar and can't take care of themselves, yet they're taking care of our loved ones each and every single day. And so, by expanding BadgerCare and coupling that with an increase in reimbursement rates, we'll make sure we have more providers, we'll make sure that more people are covered, but it also gives us an opportunity to focus more on preventative care.

I want people going to the doctor less, and if we can, invest upstream and get people to the doctor to focus on prevention, we save more money long-term for every single body, every single person in the state of Wisconsin, because we'll no longer be using crisis care, which is far more expensive.

Ross Winklbauer: If you're an older adult who doesn't drive anymore, especially out in the rural areas, Getting to the doctor or the grocery store isn't a given.

David Crowley: Yeah.

Ross Winklbauer: What's your plan to actually improve transportation options for seniors who's given up those keys?

David Crowley: You know, transportation is key. You can't talk about healthcare, you can't talk about employment, you can't talk about housing without talking about public transportation.

And as Milwaukee County Executive. You know, I run the largest county transit system in the state of Wisconsin. But what's unique to us compared to other localities across this country, is that we're one of the very few that doesn't have a dedicated funding source for public transit. And our public transit means a lot, because that last mile, where older adults, people with disabilities, utilize paratransit in order to get to work, in order to get to their doctor's appointments, in order to go wherever they want to find some level of enrichment.

And so, we need to have, here in the state of Wisconsin, a regional transportation authority across the entire state. This helps out all of our different regions to make sure they're getting the dollars needed to invest in public transit, because unfortunately, the state of Wisconsin, we have not only seen stagnation when it comes down to investments in public transit, in some cases, we've seen cuts, and we've seen a \$40 million cut, \$40 million cut at the height of the pandemic.

And so our older adults, they need to have access, not just to public transportation, but transportation that's going to work for them. And so I would like to expand paratransit across the state to make sure that our older adults, as well as people with disabilities, will be able to make that phone call so they can get to the doctor's office, they can go to the grocery store and take care of the needs that they need to.

Ross Winklbauer: We're short on nurses, nursing assistants, home health aides, basically everyone we need right as a demand for care is spiking. What is your plan to build up the workforce so older adults aren't left waiting for the care they need today?

David Crowley: Well, we absolutely, you know, expanding BadgerCare will absolutely help infuse some dollars and put the state in a really good position to negotiate drug prices and things of that nature, but what good is the hospital if it doesn't have a worker?

And we have to make sure that we are investing in our healthcare workforce moving forward, because we see the jobs that are growing all across this state in every single region. And so, we gotta get back to the basics. One, how do we start working with our young people? Introducing high schoolers to nursing at an early age, to healthcare opportunities at an early age. But it also means that we have to create better partnerships with our tech colleges, as well as our universities, to create dual enrollment programs, so by the time they actually graduate high school. You know, they can start... go right into a CNA program to really start focusing on their credentials moving forward.

And the state has to put their money where their mouth is. We can't say that we care about healthcare and only care about, you know, those that are going in without taking care of the folks who are taking care of us whenever we need that crisis care or preventative care. And so, we have to invest upstream, working with all of our UW systems, working with the private colleges that we have, as well as our tech colleges, to make sure that we're putting people in the best position possible.

But when we think about this, right, we also have to be careful, because we know that, you know, artificial intelligence is also being used, and we want to make sure that it's humans, it's us who are making the final decision when we're giving out as much information as possible to a patient that needs to make a critical decision. And so there's so much that we have to do, and I just want folks to know that, you know, I've been tackling these issues here locally, running the largest county in the state, and we'll be able to scale up the same initiatives to make sure that there's no wrong door for our older adults. When you make that phone call, when you walk through that door, we should be providing you with the wraparound service that you need in totality. So you never have to walk through those doors in the near future.

Ross Winklbauer: You talked about AI. Wisconsin consumers lose an estimated \$1.2 billion each year to online scams with older adults often suffering the greatest financial and emotional harm. Is this a consumer protection problem, a public safety problem, or an affordability problem in your mind?

David Crowley: It is all of the above, Ross. I mean, this is absolutely a consumer protection problem, and we have to figure out ways that we can get ahead of that, right? And here in Milwaukee County, we work with our Aging and Disability Resource Center.

We've actually made incredible investments in Adult Protective Services, not just when it comes down to physical and mental harm, but also financial harm. And what's unique is that we're not just putting in place a program that responds to a crisis. We want to prevent these crises from happening in the very first place. And so we have to make sure that we're working with our older adults, but more importantly, bringing them to the table, right? They know what's going on, they know how they're being affected, and they know many of the solutions that they need in order to protect themselves and protect their loved ones and to protect their neighbors.

And so, it is absolutely y'all, it's a public safety issue because this absolutely affects the mental well-being of our older adults. And when they are... when they have been scammed, it can affect them. And it brings on a lot of trauma, to be honest with you, especially with many of the conversations I have had here locally who have, you know, seen many of their life savings dwindle.

Because of these online scammers, or these phone scammers. And so we have to take this seriously, and we have to focus on upstream investments to make sure that we're preventing this from happening in the first place, because as long as we're reacting, we're doing just that. We're not protecting the public.

Ross Winklbauer: How big of a priority would this be for your administration?

David Crowley: It's a huge priority. You know, I don't understand why we don't make these types of investments in our older adults in the first place. For me, our older adults, they have paved, you know, the concrete that I'm able to walk on, becoming a county executive, being

able to have my own, you know, family and buy my own home, and so we have to focus on our older adults. Because those are the shoulders that we stand on each and every single day.

But Ross, I also think that we have to get young people to think about not just our older adults, but how do they continue to think in the future to invest in their older self? Right? We all plan to grow older, you know, and so we have to make sure that there's a plan in place for us. You know, Milwaukee County, we have been recognized by the AARP as being an age-friendly county. We're the only community in the state of Wisconsin that's age-friendly, and it's because we want to make sure that we're not just focusing on our young kids and our young babies.

But as we grow older, we need to make sure that people can age in place with dignity, that they can have a retirement savings that they have access to, so they don't fall into poverty. And so, this is a huge issue, because we're only getting older, and it's important that we take care of our older adults, because they pave the way, and the more and more we invest upstream, the cheaper it becomes long-term as well.

Ross Winklbauer: A lot of these scams start on social media now, and AI is making them more targeted. How much responsibility should tech companies bear for letting scams spread on their platforms like Meta, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter? You know, any social thing.

David Crowley: I mean, they have to be held accountable, right? They are delivering a medium that is being used for harm for our older adults. And I know that there has been incredible work here in the state of Wisconsin to make sure that we can hold tech companies accountable, but I do think that we have to build a much broader coalition. This doesn't just affect older adults here in Wisconsin. It affects older adults in the Midwest, on each of our coasts, in the entire country, in this world.

And so we really need the federal government, our congressional members, the Senate, to really step up and push legislation that's going to protect our older adults. I'm glad that we have champions and folks like Congresswoman Gwen Moore and Senator Tammy Baldwin, who are looking to make sure that we can protect our older adults. But we can't sit here and sit idle, right? We have to focus on how do we protect our entire community, because everyone is being under attack right now.

Ross Winklbauer: We've spent years telling people, here's how to spot a scam. The Wisconsin Alliance even runs seminars for retirees. But the losses keep climbing because the scammers keep getting smarter. How would you shift more of that burden off consumers and families and onto the platforms that let this stuff spread in the first place?

David Crowley: Well, we need legislation. And when I think about where we are today, you know, we need to make sure that we are working directly with our state representatives and state senators to make sure that we have some teeth. I mean, this is... at the end of the day, this is about accountability. And when you think about these tech companies who are making hand over fist. You know, they can't continue to put our most vulnerable populations in this type

of predicament. We have to protect everybody in this state, we have to protect everybody in this country.

And so we, I, as the next governor, will have an absolute duty in making sure that we have legislation ready to go, whether that's through the legislature or whether that's through the budget process, to make sure that we're protecting individuals. But we also know that this federal administration right now, they're doing everything that they can to protect many of these tech companies. And so, this is about the people at the end of the day.

We should not be protecting these businesses that are creating harm in our communities. We have to protect those who have actually delivered and who have worked extremely hard, you know, for their retirement savings. And so to see it dwindle, we should all be alarmed. And so we absolutely I have to do everything that we can to stop this, but it's going to take all of us coming together to make sure that we're investing upstream, and it's going to take the federal government as well to step up. You know, this is where I'll put a call out there to say, this is where we have to organize, right? It's not just affecting older adults. Right? It's affecting everybody right now.

Everybody's getting the phone calls, the tweets, the emails, the messages that look extremely real. And so, we have to crack down on artificial intelligence and how it's being used to actually create harm in our communities.

Ross Winklbauer: For a lot of seniors, getting scammed isn't just a scary story. It means putting off a doctor's visit. Cutting back on essentials, or watching retirement savings disappear, and the emotional toll sticks around. As a governor, what would you do to beef up consumer protection enforcement? Actually help the victims and back up the Attorney General in going after organized fraud.

David Crowley: Well, one, you know, the state has to put their money where their mouth is. And, you know, counties all across this state, they are responsible for, you know, Adult Protective Services, a great example. You know, we have made incredible investments with our local dollars to make sure that we're protecting our older adults. And I don't do this alone, Ross.

I work directly with our Commission on Aging, and every single day and every single time we meet, they remind me that we have over 190,000 older adults here within Milwaukee County. And we have hundreds of thousands across the entire state. And so we have to protect them. We have to protect their livelihood.

But one thing that we could do is, you know, we have to eliminate this stigma of getting help, and we know that many older adults, you know, they may not pick up the phone once they've been scanned, because that's frightening, and you don't want folks to know that, you know, you were manipulated. But we know that with many of these scammers, they're seeming as real as possible. I have received emails and phone calls just to buy my home, and we see how these are just scammers trying to go after individuals. And so, we have to put our money where our

mouth is. We have to work with our counties, we have to work with our aging population to make sure that we're not just putting money into programs, but it's targeted to make sure our most vulnerable communities aren't in harm's way.

Ross Winklbauer: David, we had... we had talked about how much responsibility should tech companies bear for letting scams spread on their platforms. Especially Meta and Facebook and Instagram and Twitter. Where should the government's... Or should the state government step in when they don't do enough?

David Crowley: Well, we have to have some teeth, and I think that, you know, we always talk about accountability and holding folks accountable, yet we have not passed any legislation, from my knowledge, to make sure that we can hold companies like Twitter, X, or Meta accountable for what they're actually posting or allowing people to post on their platforms. And so when it comes down to these tech companies, these tech bros have to be held accountable. They are making hand over fist. They're looking to extract as much as possible from different communities all across this country, but it's time that we actually take the bull by this horn and really focus on a level of accountability. And so the state of Wisconsin, we need legislation, but we have to make sure that we're partnering and working directly with the Attorney General's office when it comes down to it to make sure that there's no unintended consequences, and we actually have legislation To make sure that we are preventing any level of fraud scams moving forward.

Ross Winklbauer: AI is making scams more convincing, and letting criminals cast a wider net than ever. What should Wisconsin be doing right now to get ahead of the next wave of AI-driven fraud, especially for older residents?

David Crowley: You know, this goes back to protection, you know, and I don't want to sound like a broken record, but, you know, artificial intelligence is being... it can be used for good, but, you know, me being an elected official, I see it being used more for negative images, negative stories, and creating negative outcomes for those who call Wisconsin home. And so, we have to focus on how we actually regulate the artificial intelligence community when it comes down to not just our privacy, but how it's being used to harm our most vulnerable populations.

Ross Winklbauer: David, where can people find out more about your campaign?

David Crowley: Well, we are on all social media platforms, and every handle is Crowley4WIFORWI. You can also visit my website, Crowley4wi.com. You can sign up, you can get more information about our newsletters, and if you would like, you can also contribute. We know that, at the end of the day, democracy can be messy. But every single candidate in this race has the ultimate goal of defeating Tom Tiffany in November, because we don't need a MAGA extremist occupying the governor's office.

And so, I'm asking folks out there to get off the sideline. This is a full contact sport, right? It's just like football, and just because you're on the sideline doesn't mean you won't get hit. And so now

is the moment for us to build a winning coalition, not just defeat Tom Tiffany in November, but make sure we're pushing policies that directly impact older adults and their ability to have a retirement savings, their ability to live and age with dignity in a home that they can afford.

Ross Winklbauer: Well, thank you so very much, David.