

GUEST COLUMN

Mitch Henck: Trump still a turnoff for many in GOP

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Wisconsin Republicans are still tormented by Donald Trump.

Former Gov. Tommy Thompson endorses him. But his successor, Scott McCallum, is still not ready. Fox Valley Congressman Reid Ribble says he will never vote for Trump.

Locally, former Madison School Board member and Tommy Thompson speechwriter Rick Berg is "never Trump." Former Dane County Board member David Blaska was a Ted Cruz alternate delegate in Cleveland. He's not done fighting.

Blaska this month wrote a letter to the Republican National Committee urging members to dump Trump as the party's nominee. Blaska writes: "Under Rule 9(a), the Republican National Committee may fill vacancies which may occur by reason of death, declination, or otherwise. 'Otherwise' includes disqualification and removal. Please call a meeting to replace Donald Trump as the party's nominee prior to the printing of balloting for the general election to disqualify, remove, and otherwise replace him before all-but certain defeat in November."

Former Gov. Scott McCallum says: "If Trump doesn't show some traction by Labor Day, he should remove his ego and step aside." McCallum is still not ready to endorse Trump because of Trump's failure to seriously address federal budget deficits and the national debt. He also worries about Trump's protectionist tone on trade, and dislikes Trump's negative remarks about NATO.

McCallum consults Baltic States while working for the Hamilton Advisory Group in Washington, D.C. And McCallum says he doesn't like the lack of respect Trump and Hillary Clinton show Supreme Court justices and decisions they don't like.

McCallum says he would like to see Trump do well. He gets encouraged when Trump shows "glimpses of rationality." But for now, the former governor concludes: "We have two deeply flawed candidates."

Milwaukee talk show host Charlie Sykes never misses a chance to make fun of Trump when gleefully serving as a guest on Clinton-friendly cable television network MSNBC. Madison and Milwaukee conservative talk show host Vicki McKenna says: "I keep

waiting for Trump to do better, but he never does." McKenna is clearly never going to vote for Clinton, and she still says Trump has time to win her over before November.

The most powerful voice among Wisconsin Republicans is Thompson. He says about Republicans here who are opposing or resisting Trump: "I love them all, but it's time for them to come home. You don't change horses in the middle of the race."

He goes further on the metaphor: "You have to ride the horse running in the same direction. You have to take the long view. The next president may pick the next three to four Supreme Court justices who could serve 25 to 30 years. Who do you want choosing them, Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump?"

A seasoned campaigner who won more than he lost, Thompson says, "It's too early to discount him. The debates will be very important." Ultimately, Thompson adds, "It will come down to two choices, and Donald Trump is the much stronger candidate."

A Republican presidential candidate has not won Wisconsin since Ronald Reagan beat Walter Mondale by 9 percentage points in 1984. Trump trails Clinton by 15 points in the recent Marquette poll. The New York businessman dug a hole in the Republican stronghold of southeast Wisconsin when he trashed Gov. Scott Walker in his GOP primary Loss to Cruz, followed by his jabs at Paul Ryan, before finally endorsing the House speaker.

Let's be blunt: Even Michael Dukakis won Wisconsin in 1988 when the Republicans were unified behind George H. W. Bush. This year, Libertarian candidate Gary Johnson may serve as an attractive escape hatch for "never Trumpers" and doubters who could never vote for Clinton.

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