

## **In visit to Milwaukee, Vinehout says she could woo swing voters in general election**

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Gubernatorial candidate Kathleen Vinehout spent Saturday afternoon in the heart of Milwaukee, where she told residents of the Riverwest neighborhood that she's the candidate who can win over the small but crucial undecided vote that will determine the outcome of the recall.

With polls showing Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett in a dead heat with Gov. Scott Walker, Vinehout said it makes sense to choose a Democratic candidate who can win swing voters in what she calls Wisconsin's "fertile crescent" -- a curved swath stretching from La Crosse and Eau Claire, through Wausau and up through Green Bay and northward.

"This is where Walker's numbers are soft," Vinehout told a small group gathered at the Riverwest Public House, a community-owned bar that serves as a neighborhood center.

"We need someone to appeal to voters who do not always vote Democrat," she said. "I won when Tom Barrett got 3 percentage points less than I did and Russ Feingold got 2 percentage points less than I did, in a part of the state where Democrats have to carry in order to win."

"I provide the strongest contrast to Scott Walker," said Vinehout. "Ten years, I've spent dairy farming. Now when those dairy farmers wake up on election day and they do their chores and they come in and take off their boots and put on their going-to-town clothes, think about it -- who are they going to vote for? Scott Walker that spent his whole life in public office and is a politician or Kathleen Vinehout, who trudged out to the barn at 5 a.m. and knows what it's like to get her hands dirty and her boots muddy? Scott Walker already lost the teachers -- he can't afford to lose both the teachers and the farmers."

She added, "If you don't believe me, think about that he opened his campaign on a dairy farm in western Wisconsin and he was just in Eau Claire yesterday and today. I mean, why is he spending so much time in my neighborhood?"

In Milwaukee, Vinehout stressed her knowledge of issues both rural and urban to a neighborhood that leans Democrat but also has undecided voters.

Vinehout surprised residents of Riverwest, known for its diversity and urban renewal efforts in an aging portion of Milwaukee, by revealing that she spent seven years living in St. Louis' inner city and that she and her husband spent another three years as consultants for an alcohol and drug rehab center in impoverished East St. Louis.

"Just about as urban as you can get," said Vinehout.

Spike Bandy and Vince Bushell, who call themselves unofficial "mayors" of the Riverwest neighborhood, say a majority of their community wants to recall Walker. But they say many residents are ambivalent toward Barrett, their actual mayor.

"Whoever wins the Democratic primary, that's who they'll vote for," said Bandy of Riverwest's approximate 12,000 residents. "But many don't think Barrett has done a particularly good job. A lot of people here are leaning toward Falk, for whatever reason. I've been in the process of trying to change their minds, trying to point them to (Vinehout's) website, pointing them toward (her video on) YouTube. Once they see her positions, once they hear her, they're going to vote for her."

Bushell, who publishes Riverwest Currents, a neighborhood newspaper, said residents are overwhelmingly angry at Walker for a number of reasons, not just collective bargaining. He said he's most upset with Walker's lack of support for alternative transportation, especially his rejection of high-speed rail between Milwaukee and Madison.

As she listened to residents complain that lack of public transportation was contributing to high unemployment in Milwaukee, Vinehout said, "It's not just Milwaukee, the whole state is in a bind." She said Wausau, Schofield and other communities have also reduced bus routes and Saturday bus service.

"These people, they feel so disenfranchised because they have to change their whole life. One guy told me, 'I have to figure out a new dentist, I have to figure out a different place to go grocery shopping,' " she said.

According to Vinehout, people in far western Wisconsin long for a transportation system connecting them to jobs in the Twin Cities.

Vinehout said if elected, she would continue to push a bill she wrote as a state senator to allow communities to create regional transit authorities.

Asked how she would combat high unemployment among black males -- and as one Riverwest resident added, the less-visible problem of high underemployment among black females -- Vinehout said she would redirect grants and loans available to the state's economic development offices to specifically focus on neighborhood black- and minority-owned businesses -- not big companies that put a "token black" person in charge of a project in order to apply for minority business funding.

She also said her state budget would fully restore funding for education and for tech colleges.

"I think tech education is huge," said Vinehout. "I started out in the tech college system because I didn't have enough money to go school," said Vinehout, who eventually graduated from Southern Illinois University and went on to earn a master's public health degree and a PhD in health services. "All of my brothers and sisters were able to raise their income level because we went through the tech college system."

Milwaukee resident Darcie Muckler traveled to the Riverwest neighborhood from Bay View on the city's south side to meet Vinehout, whom she had never heard of until a week ago when she watched a DVD put together by Vinehout's supporters. After seeing the DVD and watching Friday evening's televised debate with all the Dem gubernatorial candidates, Muckler said she threw her support behind Vinehout.

"She's the only one who has a plan, a specific answer for everything, although I thought La Follette was OK, too," said Muckler, a 20-year Milwaukee County employee who retired last year. She said she senses that Vinehout would work best with Barrett, noting that if Barrett won, "she'd have a lot of influence in what's going on."