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Chvala and Kanavas debate gender gap

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Former GOP state Sen. Ted Kanavas declared that single women pose a problem for the Republican party nationally, but says married women "are more accepting" of Republican messages.

His comments followed former Dem state Sen. Chuck Chvala's assertion that "the Republican party, nationally and in Wisconsin, has bottled white male anger."

The pair faced off at UW-Milwaukee's Zilber School of Public Health on Wednesday offering predictions and observations on upcoming elections.

Asked to comment on the growing "gender gap" among voters nationwide, which shows female voters have been trending Democratic, Kanavas replied, "The biggest struggle for Republicans isn't necessarily with women, it's with single women. See, married women, I think, are more accepting of some of the things Republicans talk about, but we do, I think, a poor job of communicating with single women of all backgrounds, whether it be African American, Hispanic, white, whatever."

But Chvala, a Madison attorney, said women with families are most affected by political issues.

"Women, traditionally have been responsible in the family for everything. They not only have to worry about how the money is coming in; they have to figure out who's educating my kids, who's taking care of them and how am I getting them health care and how is that affordable? Guys tend to be a little bit -- I hate to say this -- but we're more testosterone-based - you know, 'Just get out of my way, give me a job and I'm out of here, in fact, don't give me a job, I'm going to go get my job, get out of my way,' and so a simplistic narrative works," Chvala said.

Kanavas said male-female differences are playing out in Wisconsin's gubernatorial race between GOP Gov. Scott Walker and Dem challenger Mary Burke.

"On the male side, especially in Wisconsin, a lot of them resonate with the notion that Walker had the guts to take on the fiscal problems in this state," said Kanavas. "Men, a lot of times, think about fiscal issues first."

But Kanavas, now with Michael Best Strategies, acknowledged that some voters who would ordinarily choose a GOP candidate for state attorney general might choose Dem attorney general candidate Susan Happ - Wisconsin's other prominent

female political hopeful - "as a potential check on Governor Walker."

Both former lawmakers agreed that the current political landscape looks better for Republicans, in part because parties of the president in a second term tend to do poorly in midterm elections.

Statewide, Chvala said several strong, qualified Dem Senate candidates might lose because of gerrymandered districts that favor Republicans. Kanavas predicted Republicans will retain the majority in the state Senate after November, and Chvala acknowledged that's likely.

Both Chvala and Kanavas agreed that the Affordable Care Act, or Obamacare, is no longer the hot-button election issue in Wisconsin that it was in 2010 and 2012.

"That's because it's working," said Chvala.

But Kanavas said it's because voters are focused on local issues.

[Listen to the luncheon.](#)

-- *By Kay Nolan*
For WisPolitics.com