

Candidate Name: Pete Karas

Date: September 12, 2026

1. Why are you running for elected office?

I am running to help break us free from the destructive two-party system. Neither Republicans nor Democrats have served us well, and voters feel stuck picking the lesser of two evils. I want to change that so people feel comfortable voting for someone who matches their values.

The Secretary of State is the weakest office of its kind in America. It is an administrative office with very few policy-making duties. That makes it the perfect race for folks to vote for a third-party candidate with no perceived spoiler effect. I am running on the Green Party and also have the endorsement of three other minor parties because they know we need to break the duopoly so folks have choices.

All that aside, I am qualified to serve as Wisconsin's Secretary of State. I served on the Racine City Council for three terms and have owned several small businesses, including a risk management firm, a restaurant and music venue, and a lunchtime catering business. All of these have given me both the administrative ability the office needs and the people skills to serve the public well.

2. If elected, what are the three priority policies you will work to advance?

First, the BADASS (Ballot Access, Democracy, and Suffrage Statute) Bill, a democracy overhaul I've written up in full. Automatic voter registration. Restoring the vote to people who've been convicted of felonies. Public campaign financing so candidates stop dialing for corporate dollars. Proportional representation in the state Senate so your vote matches the result. And scrapping the Elections Commission and returning to a nonpartisan Government Accountability Board. Passing this is outside the SoS office, but the seat gives me a platform to advocate for it.

Second, the Common School Fund. The Secretary of State serves on the Board of Commissioners of Public Lands, which sent a record \$73.5 million to school libraries this year. That fund is the only library money most Wisconsin districts get. I support it, and I'd press to grow it.

I'd also push the equity conversation. Right now the payout is a flat amount per child, ages four to twenty, and that split is written into the state constitution. A flat rate treats a high-poverty district and a wealthy one the same, even though the poorer district leans on those library dollars more. Getting need into that formula would take a constitutional change, and I'd use the office to start that fight.

Third, a statewide ban on new data centers. These plants burn massive power and water for little local benefit, and they drive up rates for everyone else. That ban would take legislation, so it's outside what the SoS office can enact. What I can do sits on the Board of Commissioners of Public Lands: I'll vote against handing trust lands to data centers or high-voltage transmission

corridors through easements. And I'll use the seat to fight lines like BECI and MariBell across the Driftless.

3. What are your three most important education issues?

First, school library funding. The Common School Fund is an important source of money for Wisconsin school libraries. In the last state budget, Milwaukee County was allowed to keep about \$2.2 million a year in fines that otherwise would have gone into the fund and use the money for prosecutors. The Legislature passed it, and Gov. Evers signed the budget. The Board of Commissioners of Public Lands objected, and this month a Waukesha County judge ruled the provision unconstitutional.

I think that shows why the BCPL matters. If the Legislature tries to take money away from the fund, the people sitting on that board ought to fight it, and I will.

Second, school referendums. Wisconsin limits how much revenue school districts can raise, and when state funding doesn't keep up with costs, districts wind up going back to local taxpayers for referendum after referendum. You see districts asking for money just to maintain programs, pay staff, and operate their buildings. The state's own records back that up.

The problem is that some communities can afford to pass those referendums and some can't. I don't think the quality of a kid's education should depend so heavily on the tax base of the community they happen to live in.

Third, vouchers. Wisconsin's Milwaukee voucher program dates to 1989-90. Racine's program began in the 2011-12 school year, and the statewide Wisconsin Parental Choice Program followed in 2013-14.

I saw the Racine program develop in my hometown, and I don't support continuing to shift public money toward private-school vouchers. Public schools have obligations that private schools don't always have, and public education should come first when the state decides where education dollars go.

And I'm not going to pretend only one party has had a hand in this. Republicans built the voucher programs, and Democratic governors signed the budgets that funded and expanded them. That's part of the record, and I won't hesitate to point it out.

4. How does your role relate to public school funding, and what changes, if any, would you make to how public schools are funded?

The Secretary of State has one direct connection to school funding: serving on the Board of Commissioners of Public Lands.

The board manages Wisconsin's School Trust Funds and roughly 75,000 acres of trust land. The Common School Fund now has about \$1.6 billion in principal, and its earnings provide

money to every public school district for library materials. The distribution was \$70 million in 2025 and increased to \$73.5 million in 2026.

That's where I can have a direct impact. I would protect the Common School Fund, oppose attempts to divert money from it, and make trust land decisions based on what's best for the fund and Wisconsin schools over the long term. That means I'd vote against easements that trade the fund's long-term value for a quick payout, including data centers and high-voltage transmission corridors on trust land.

The Legislature and Governor make most major school funding decisions, including revenue limits, voucher funding, and special education reimbursement. The Secretary of State doesn't get a vote on those. I can speak out about them, but I wouldn't pretend the office has powers it doesn't have.

I'd use the platform to push the state to actually fund special education at a real reimbursement rate, and to let revenue limits keep pace with inflation so districts stop living referendum to referendum.

5. Would you oppose any efforts for the state to take over public school districts or school boards?

Yes.

I believe local public schools should remain accountable to the communities they serve. Replacing an elected school board with state-appointed officials takes decision-making away from local voters and parents.

There is also a troubling history of state takeovers disproportionately affecting districts serving large numbers of Black students, and research has found that, on average, takeovers have not improved student achievement.

If a district is struggling, the state should provide the resources and assistance needed to improve it, not take control away from the people who live there.

6. If applicable, will you support legislation to restore full collective bargaining rights to all municipal workers?

Yes. I support repealing Act 10 and restoring full collective bargaining rights to public employees.

Act 10 took away most collective bargaining rights from teachers and many other public workers. I watched what happened to the public workforce after Act 10. People left, morale suffered, and school districts struggled to keep experienced staff. Fifteen years later, teachers and public workers should have the right to sit down with their employers and negotiate wages, benefits, and working conditions.

The Secretary of State doesn't get a vote in the Legislature, so I wouldn't pretend I could repeal Act 10 from that office. But I would publicly support repeal and stand with public employees who are fighting to get their bargaining rights back.

7. Do you accept funds from political action committees?

No. I do not accept PAC money.

That includes corporate PACs, labor PACs, and other political action committees. My campaign is funded by individual donors, and we've raised more than \$60,000 that way, without a dollar of PAC or corporate money. I respect the role unions and grassroots organizations play in politics, and I've chosen to fund this campaign a different way.

That's also why I support the BADASS Bill, which would create a public financing system so candidates can run competitive campaigns without depending on PAC money or large private donors.