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[00:00:20] **Speaker 1** The following program is a PBS Wisconsin original production. The race for the white House takes flight. Welcome to the first debate of the 2024 presidential campaign live at Five Star Forum in Milwaukee.

[00:00:35] **Speaker 2** The first Republican presidential primary debate takes the Milwaukee stage, while extreme heat leads to school closures. I'm Fredricka Friedberg tonight. I'm here in now a rundown of the first standoff between GOP presidential hopefuls with reflections from voters. And our political panel, Phil Mickelson and Scott Ross. Plus, our last in our abortion series looks at the medical perspective. It's here and now for August 25th. Funding for Here and Now is provided by the Focus Fund for Journalism and Friends of PBS Wisconsin. The heat was on in Milwaukee this week, with eight candidates appearing for their first debate Wednesday night. As Stephen Potter reports, voters got a look at the Republican slate of presidential hopefuls for the upcoming 2024 election.

[00:01:37] **Speaker 1** As a voter, I didn't walk away completely sold or completely put off by anyone, really. That's despite the eight candidates trying to make their mark. The difference between you and me? Yeah, I got a potential politician. That's the difference. Who can answer a question was comical at a point, and I seen aspects of some of the competitors that I hadn't heard before. Political scientist Mordecai.

[00:01:59] **Speaker 3** Lee says Republicans have an impressively deep bench.

[00:02:02] **Speaker 4** With Wisconsin being 49.9% Democratic and 49.9% Republicans. I think for the Democrats who are watching it, the moral of the story is be afraid, be very afraid.

[00:02:18] **Speaker 3** While former President Donald Trump wasn't there. His presence was felt.

[00:02:24] **Speaker 1** While he was in the room, even though he wasn't in the room, and certainly a little disappointed that he didn't show up, although I think we did a different president.

[00:02:32] **Speaker 5** I'm leaning towards Trump.

[00:02:34] **Speaker 2** But without him.

[00:02:35] **Speaker 5** Here, I thought it'd be a good time to hear loudly from the other candidates.

[00:02:41] **Speaker 3** One of the most disagreeable topics of the night was abortion. I will support the cause of life as governor and as president.

[00:02:49] **Speaker 5** Let's treat this like the like a respectful issue that it is, and humanize the situation and stop demonizing that situation.

[00:02:57] **Speaker 6** Consensus is the opposite of leadership. When the Supreme Court returned this question to the American people, they didn't just send it to the states, only it's not a state only issue.

[00:03:08] **Speaker 1** It's a moral issue. Another hot button issue, climate change. The climate change.

[00:03:13] **Speaker 5** Is a hoax. First of all. Yes. Is climate change real? Yes it is. But if you want to go and really change the environment, then we need to start telling China and India that they have to lower their emissions.

[00:03:25] **Speaker 3** The candidates were also asked if they would still support Republican frontrunner Donald Trump, despite the felony charges stacking up against him.

[00:03:32] **Speaker 1** Someone's got to stop normalizing this conduct. Okay, now. And that whether or not whether or not you believe that the criminal charges are right or wrong, the conduct is beneath the office of president of the United States. President Trump, I believe, was the best president of the 21st century.

[00:04:02] **Speaker 3** It's a fact. Not surprisingly, Democrats weren't impressed.

[00:04:06] **Speaker 1** I grew up in people that really didn't seem to recognize why Republicans lost in 2020 and 2022, and especially this spring in Wisconsin in the Supreme Court election. The public doesn't like this kind of extremism. For his part, Mordecai Lee says debates like this give voters the chance to.

[00:04:22] **Speaker 3** Choose their top tier candidates.

[00:04:24] **Speaker 1** If you got three.

[00:04:25] **Speaker 4** That you like in a certain priority, there's a decent chance that at least one of them will be standing and still in the race by the time April comes around.

[00:04:36] **Speaker 1** Reporting from Milwaukee for here and now I'm Steven Potter.

[00:04:40] **Speaker 2** For their take on the Republican presidential primary debate. Two veteran politicos, our political panelists, Republican Bill McCutcheon and Democrat Scott Ross. And thanks for being here, guys. Thanks for having us. So first to you, but what was your take of the debate?

[00:04:53] **Speaker 3** I liked it. So as a former hockey coach, I like the fact that they competed for the nomination. You can't teach kids to compete. And six of them, I think, brought their A-game. I didn't think Hutchinson or Tim Scott did, but the other six really competed to try and get this nomination. My ranking of the debate the other night would have been Donald Trump. Number one. He didn't get hit at all the whole night. Ron DeSantis, number two. I would have had Vivek Ramaswamy, number three, and Nikki Haley number four, and Mike pence number five. There's a couple problems with a few of them. One was Trump. He wasn't there. Right. So we'll see over time whether or not this hurts his big lead nationally in in the key states I think it will. number two Ramaswamy he tried to fill the outsider lane, which Trump has fully filled. Right. And the one thing that the moderators didn't ask Ramaswamy was when he said Donald Trump was the best president in the 21st century. The follow up should have been he's in this race. So what are you doing in this race? Exactly. Nobody asked him that.

[00:05:52] **Speaker 2** Yeah.

[00:05:53] **Speaker 3** Yeah. Right. And the final one is Mike pence. There's Scott Ross has more chance of getting the Republican nomination than Mike pence does. The MAGA voters will never allow him to be the nominee. So I think it's time for the former VP to exit stage left.

[00:06:07] **Speaker 2** What do you think about that?

[00:06:08] **Speaker 4** Well, if this is just an excuse to try and get me to go to Milwaukee next year, that's not the way to do it. I saw, you know, what I saw was what the what the American people saw, which is, agreeing with Bill on the fact that Donald Trump, you know, came in second. Joe Biden came in first in that debate, because what you saw was a group of people trying to clamor for Donald Trump's approval, while issuing opinions that are just so beyond what the American people are supporting right now. The American people do support abortion rights. The Republicans will have a nationwide abortion ban. The Republican Party opposes climate change. It doesn't believe it exists. We saw that in the just the a terrible lack of raising hands and, you know, that sort of thing. Overall, I think, you know, the big news there was that Ron DeSantis turned out to be exactly the paper tiger that Donald Trump said that he was, because he had absolutely no impact in that debate other than letting us know that any single time he's asked a question, he's going to answer it in a very surly, snarly way. And I will say the thing about, you know, Ramaswamy, when you get me to root for Mike pence during a debate because you're being so irritating, like, I think that's a feat, a feat well done.

[00:07:16] **Speaker 2** Scott, I want to ask you this morning, Carly, just said in the report that we had, the debate that, Republicans have a deep bench of impressive presidential hopefuls. To the extent he said the Democrats should be very, very afraid. What's your response to that?

[00:07:32] **Speaker 4** The Democrats have Joe Biden to run this time. He is the incumbent president. He has created 13 million jobs. He has helped build an economy from the ground up and from the middle out that is helping all of Americans to try and thrive in this, in this, in these trying times. I mean, the fact is, is the Democrats don't need a good bench right now in 2024 because they'll be running in 2028 with a whole new candidate.

[00:07:56] **Speaker 3** Joe Biden is 106 years old. I mean, you have no bench at this point in time. I agree with Mordecai on this, the one actually who impressed me the most but probably won't last much longer, was North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum. I thought he was authentic. I thought he had really smooth answers. The reality is you probably won't meet the thresholds for the debate in California in September.

[00:08:16] **Speaker 2** So, Bill, how does Donald Trump maintain such a commanding lead even as he turns himself in for a rest on his latest indictment?

[00:08:26] **Speaker 3** There's too many candidates in this field. The reality is, those that did not qualify for the Milwaukee debate should already be out of this race. Those who do not qualify for California when the standards get raised should also drop out. The notion that this will get decided in New Hampshire or South Carolina or on Super Tuesday is nonsense in this cycle. This cycle is moving faster than any in our lifetime. If those who want to another alternative other than Donald Trump to be the nominee of the Republican Party, if you are supporting someone other than Mike, Ron DeSantis or Nikki Haley, at this point, you are wasting your time and your money. The others need to get out so that we can consolidate this race.

[00:09:07] **Speaker 2** What do you say about Donald Trump having this commanding lead?

[00:09:10] **Speaker 4** Well, it shows that the Republican Party has lost its mind because this guy was unfit in 2016, he was unfit in 2020. And he remains unfit and indicted in 2024. And the thing the thing about the election, the debate the other night that you noticed is whenever, from my perspective, any of those candidates tried to articulate a position that seemed even reasonable. They disqualified themselves from winning the actual primary. You know, the thing that Nikki Haley said about, you know, how she was trying to talk about abortion, the talk process on it and why it might not be able to. Possible and, Chris Christie and the things he said, they can't win the nomination.

[00:09:45] **Speaker 3** Now you're going to see Nikki Haley's numbers move with women. She moved my wife. She had the right answer on abortion on that debate stage. And the other seven boys on that stage ought to pay attention to what she said if they want to win.

[00:09:55] **Speaker 4** She had an absolute minority opinion. 70% of Americans support abortion rights. She may have had enough. She may have had an effect on, you know, some women in the Republican Party. But the fact is, the vast majority of Americans who are voters support abortion rights.

[00:10:09] **Speaker 2** Bill, I want to ask you this, speaking of indictments, as we just were, Wisconsin's false electors. And the architects of that effort figured prominently in the Georgia indictment. Can Wisconsin retreat from the madness of all of this this time around?

[00:10:24] **Speaker 3** Well, we're still scheduled to be one of the five key swing states next year, but that could change. I'm not totally convinced Donald Trump could be competitive here. There's no evidence to suggest that he's growing his coalition if he is, in fact, the nominee for the Republican Party. Moreover, his style, the sledgehammer style of literally smashing his opponents within the Republican Party is so against Ronald Reagan's 11th commandment. It does not play here. We may not be Minnesota nice, but we're fair here, and Republicans will not respond well. If Trump destroys DeSantis or Haley personally.

[00:11:01] **Speaker 2** Scott, can Wisconsin retreat from the midterms?

[00:11:04] **Speaker 4** I don't see how, because Republicans are hell bent on keeping whatever power they have and gaining whatever power they need to gain. And we've seen that, you know, across the board, I you know, I don't see how with the way the Republican media machine works in terms of articulating these things that seem, you know, the Democrats aren't just wrong on issues, they're evil, you know, and that's a problem. And that's not going to stop. And Donald Trump, certainly at the top of the ticket for as long as he is at the top of the ticket, is not going to change that. Unfortunately for all of us, for democracy.

[00:11:32] **Speaker 2** It is kind of true. People aren't just wrong, they're evil. Right?

[00:11:36] **Speaker 3** Well, and Republicans have to get away from the notion of owning lips. Let's sell an agenda. I mean that you want to bring people to your side. Ultimately, campaigns winning campaigns are all about addition, not subtraction.

[00:11:47] **Speaker 2** All right. We need to leave it there. Bill McCausland, Scott Ross. Thank you.

[00:11:50] **Speaker 3** Thank you.

[00:11:52] **Speaker 2** Turning to our abortion series, the Wisconsin laws relating to abortion are unconstitutionally vague, according to three physician Interveners named in the complex lawsuit challenging Wisconsin's 1849 law on abortion. The lawsuit, initially brought by State Attorney General Josh Kaul last year, names three district attorneys as defendants because there were Planned Parenthood clinics performing abortions in their counties. They are Dane County Da Ishmael Ozanne. Milwaukee County D.A. John Chisholm and Sheboygan County D.A. Joel or Manscaped. Of the three, only Sheboygan County Da. Romanski has previously stated he would prosecute physicians in violation of the law. The lawsuit alleges the physicians fear criminal charges and thus have had to alter how care is provided to their patients. In court filings, D.A. Romanski argues the lawsuit is an attempt to obtain from this court what the legislature has refused to do, and also says although the Intervenors raised concerns regarding how the 1849 law may apply to abortions, they may need to perform as part of their care of pregnant patients. They cannot meet their burden of demonstrating that the 1849 law cannot constitutionally be applied to any abortion. One could, for example, apply the 1849 law to prohibit an elective abortion and a healthy mother of a 6 to 8 week old unborn child, without implicating any of the intervenors concerns in their complaint. Neither de Romanski nor his attorney responded to our request for an interview. Continuing our series on abortion tonight, we hear from the medical perspective. Marissa Wilcher has this story.

[00:13:51] **Speaker 5** When I got the results, I knew what I wanted to do. It was really hard emotionally. I was devastated. I wanted that baby and I wanted everything to be fine. I wanted her to be healthy, but she wasn't. And I knew that if I carried that pregnancy to term, I was putting my own health at risk. And I also knew that my baby, if she survived to term, would only suffer. And I didn't want that. So I. Was very confident that I was making the right decision for my family. Jenn Volstead made her decision while abortion was still legal. The cascade of events following the US Supreme Court's ruling on Dobbs v Jackson Women's Health Organization hit states like Wisconsin the hardest. Creating a near-total abortion ban in the state one year ago.

[00:14:49] **Speaker 3** You know, we have yet to see what systemic, consequences this, this, this law will have.

[00:14:57] **Speaker 5** We're already seeing it. We're seeing it at all levels. Wisconsin health care providers found themselves in legal limbo, as a number of dated and conflicting laws remain in state statute. The default legal standing fell back to one law from 1849. It says destroying the life of an unborn child is a felony, except to save the life of the mother. We didn't even know that germs cause disease in 1849. This was 70 years before women even had the right to vote. You didn't even often know you were pregnant until you actually could feel fetal movement.

[00:15:34] **Speaker 3** We are in a situation where that interpretation of a law from 1849 is really a gray area.

[00:15:40] **Speaker 2** Now we're operating this narrow channel of providing the best care and not committing malpractice and being careful not to break a law. And so you think about things that you never had to think about before.

[00:15:56] **Speaker 5** Following the Dobbs decision, doctors Kristen Lively, Christopher Ford and Ginger McIntosh put themselves forward as interveners in a lawsuit filed by State Attorney General Josh Kaul challenging the 1849 law. Prior to Dobbs, doctor counseled patients at the Sheboygan Planned Parenthood clinic, one of a small number of Planned Parenthood's in the state that provided abortions. To know that there's a place where you can go, where someone will listen to you and hear you and help you make the decision that you need to make within the context of your life. That was what we were doing in Sheboygan, and I was really proud of it. Doctor McIntosh works in maternal fetal medicine, teaches at the Medical College of Wisconsin, and conducts research on pre-eclampsia, a serious condition she sees in many of her patients.

[00:16:48] **Speaker 2** Those of us in maternal fetal medicine highlight our subset of obstetrics is, kind of the highest of highs and some of the lowest of lows, because, you know, when we have really great outcomes, it's super rewarding. But at the same time, we, we help families through tragic outcomes as well. These pregnant people, either have high risk conditions themselves. So medical complications. But on the flip side, we also take care of fetuses. So get the the most family centered outcome that we can.

[00:17:21] **Speaker 5** Doctor Ford works in emergency medicine with experience practicing in rural and urban settings.

[00:17:28] **Speaker 3** As an emergency medicine provider, I see women that are pregnant, when you know things are going wrong. Most of the time, we are mandated as emergency providers to provide the most salient care as we can, to protect the lives of the patients in front of us. And so inherent in that were capabilities of performing medical abortion, surgical abortions, if that is required, in the instance of instability of the patient, for the life of the patient as well.

[00:17:57] **Speaker 5** Jen Volstead worked as a labor and delivery nurse. I really discovered during my career that those patients that were going through difficult times were my favorite patients to take care of, because I felt like I made the most impact as a nurse and what their experience looked like. Prior to the Dobbs ruling, Wisconsin patients and physicians had more options when it came to making decisions about reproductive health care. We would have conversations about what all their options were. We would talk about everything. Sometimes we would connect them with prenatal care. Sometimes we would connect them with adoption services. Sometimes they would go home and think about it, and they just wouldn't return for that second visit. But often they did, and it wasn't unusual for people to thank us.

[00:18:43] **Speaker 2** It was full scope care based on what the families and patients wanted. Sometimes a different understanding emerged, and families that never saw themselves doing that couldn't reconcile sort of what the after looked like and, and would choose, would choose to interrupt the pregnancy and have an abortion. And those were always hard cases, you know, patients that we cried with, that I would go home and cry about.

[00:19:10] **Speaker 5** Now they're managing realities much different than before.

[00:19:14] **Speaker 2** We still provide the same information and similar counseling. If it becomes clear that they're leaning towards, a termination. I have to say, unfortunately, this is illegal in the state of Wisconsin, and if this is what you choose to pursue, then we'll have to, give you information on how to pursue this out of state. And it it feels like I'm abandoning my patients and saying that.

[00:19:39] **Speaker 5** Today I am not working in Wisconsin because of the lawsuit, because of the threat of criminalization, for providing my patients with standard of care medicine. So I have the joy of working in rural Minnesota and northern Arizona on the Navajo reservation. So in a way, it's very satisfying. But the truth is, I want to be home.

[00:20:04] **Speaker 3** That's become a huge just it's a huge, huge problem. It's not the situation that I think any of us want.

[00:20:12] **Speaker 5** A central issue physicians must now navigate is the exception to save the life of the mother.

[00:20:18] **Speaker 3** The law, as written in the state of Wisconsin, is still very great. The next presentation of that patient may be in full blown sepsis, and it may be something that is threatening for the life of the mother. We've heard reports, you know, in other states that have very strict, abortion bans like we do here in Wisconsin, in which, you know, we we've had patients that have been told to wait in the car until they become even more unstable, in order to present to the emergency department. So at that point in time, they can do something about it. Now, of course, that's an egregious example. And it's something that we don't aspire to, however, that is someone's interpretation of the law in states that have stricter abortion laws, such as Wisconsin. You know, we see morbidity and mortality specifically mortality go up by 60, 60% plus. For mothers as well as for their infants.

[00:21:03] **Speaker 2** It's intrinsically vague. Which then, causes physicians to potentially second guess, like, is this risky enough? Because everyone who practices medicine knows that it can be very gray for a while and then become very black and white. And you, the longer you wait to intervene, the worst outcomes are in general.

[00:21:26] **Speaker 5** There was a time when I was in Minnesota where someone presented in a in an emergency on an ambulance and an ambulance. She was bleeding. She was 21 weeks pregnant with a desired pregnancy, but she was bleeding so much that she had to go to the operating room right away. And I had to perform an abortion. And I couldn't help but to think to myself, if this was happening to me in Wisconsin, I would be terrified about what the next steps would be, about, what the implications for my future my career would be.

[00:21:58] **Speaker 3** There will still always be some providers who are very concerned about that, as they rightly so should be. You know, there's risk of prosecution up to six years as well as a $10,000 fine. You know, there's things that will likely be in the back of a lot of providers minds, especially those who are practicing in more rural locations.

[00:22:13] **Speaker 5** For Jen Volstead, having the procedure done without any additional barriers made all the difference. Dealing with the grief and the stress. To have to jump through those extra hoops while also dealing with that. I honestly don't know how I would navigate it. So now when I look back, I feel. So recovered and healed. I also wouldn't have my son if I didn't have this abortion because of the timing. If I had to carry to term. Julian here is he just turned six and he is one of the most joyful and curious people I've ever met. He just he's kind of a ball of energy. He comes in here and runs and jumps over my couch and is very snuggly and tells me all the time how much he loves me. The more we try to focus on, is that right or wrong or is that okay? The more we're focused on making choices for other people when we're not involved in their health care and we're not medical professionals? Physicians worry not only about the consequences today, but those yet to come.

[00:23:34] **Speaker 2** There's a there's certainly a domino effect.

[00:23:36] **Speaker 3** And what I'm seeing over and over and over again is this getting worse over time. And a lot of that has to do with the access of health care, with the access of, you know, care to obstetrics and gynecology. A lot of these women in these areas rely on their OB guides as primary care. To be honest with you. And a lot of that mortality increase that we're seeing is the lack of the ability to have follow up, not only, as we said before, are we creating those health care deserts in rural settings. We're doing that in inner city settings to which are already, you know, having a lot of issues inherent to access of care in general as well as health care outcomes. And so those are the things that, for me personally, I take much stake in, as something that, you know, I will continue to fight for these patients because they need a voice. Everybody needs a voice in this, in this fight. And a lot of the voices that are at the table right now don't see these patients, and they don't have any medical background, but they're making these decisions.

[00:24:36] **Speaker 5** I talk to recruiters all the time who are looking for doctors in states like Texas, and it's nearly impossible to find doctors who are willing to go to states that have such hostile bans. So, yeah, I think this is the tip of the iceberg. And if we can't turn the ship around, this dire physician shortage that we are already experiencing is going to get much worse. Not just with you and doctors, but family medicine doctors who are the safety net in rural Wisconsin where people are already suffering. Most of all, these health care providers want to go back to the law as it stood in Wisconsin prior to the Dobbs ruling.

[00:25:13] **Speaker 2** I just want to do my job. So the fact that politics are trying to be present in my exam room, present in the back of my mind as I'm looking at a patient and talking to her to that that patient and their family, that it's impacting that at all. Feels crazy to me. Because really, we should just be providing the best evidence based medical care that we can. That's right. For that patient and right for their family.

[00:25:46] **Speaker 5** Reporting for here in now. I'm Marissa will check.

[00:25:50] **Speaker 2** As to the lawsuit challenging the Wisconsin abortion ban. Attorney general call is seeking to expedite an injunction related to a recent circuit court decision in the case. The case is expected to end up before the state supreme Court. For more on this and our previous reporting on abortion in Wisconsin, including hearing from women who have had an abortion and pregnancy resource centers that discourage them. Visit our website at PBS wisconsin.org and then click on the news tab. That's our program for tonight. I'm Fredricka Freiberg. Have a good weekend. Funding for Here and Now is provided by the Focus Fund for Journalism and Friends of PBS Wisconsin.