

The Question

At a forum hosted by Citizen Action of Wisconsin on April 14, 2026, the main candidates in the Democratic primary were asked their views on data centers. Here are their answers.

Dr. Robert Kraig: The rapid buildout of data centers, without comprehensive state planning, threatens the urgent need to rapidly cut greenhouse gas emissions and will massively increase already expensive utility costs for homeowners and renters. Do you support pausing data center building and total, comprehensive guardrails be established to require 100% of increased energy capacity come from much cheaper renewable energy, make utility prices affordable, guarantee high paying union jobs, both for building the data centers and for their long term operation?

The Answers



Kelda Roys

“Right now, what we have is completely unacceptable. The biggest, most powerful wealthy companies in the history of the world are coming into our Wisconsin communities, who, by the way, have been starved of resources by Republican politicians, to the point that they can’t even pave their roads.

Kind of shaking a bag of money in front of them, and getting sweetheart deals in secret. This is totally unacceptable. We need strong state guardrails that put our local communities in a powerful negotiating position, vis-a-vis these companies.

There must be public transparency and real local control, including the power to say no. We don’t want a data center, or we don’t want it here, or we don’t want it this way. There have to be protections for workers so that every worker is a union worker, paid a high family supporting wage.

There need to be protections for the environment, for land, air, and water, and remediation, and there need to be protections for ratepayers, to make sure that we are not subsidizing the data center, and in fact, they need to subsidize us.

We need data centers to be paying us for the privilege of profiting off of Wisconsin’s bounty, whether that’s our workers or our natural resources. To the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars. These things print money, and it is not acceptable for us to not get our fair share.

Now, what we also don’t want to happen is to have data centers go to completely unregulated states, because we know that pollution doesn’t stay in state borders, right? Water crosses borders. And we are connected with our utility grid. So we’re gonna be paying the high cost if states don’t regulate.

That is why it is essential that Wisconsin be a leader in passing very strong regulations —”
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Missy Hughes

“I support legislation that protects the environment in these conversations. Make sure that we give DNR the tools to be strong negotiators as they are sitting down at the table with these incredibly large companies. I was in those rooms and, you know, while we were fighting to make sure to protect Wisconsin’s ratepayers and Wisconsin’s environment. Having the words of the Wisconsin people behind us in the form of legislation would be an amazing tool to be able to say, these are the table stakes for how you can come to Wisconsin and be a partner, and we have to have those in place.

Legislation that would protect the environment, protect rate payers, make sure that these projects are being built by union workers, along with the renewable energy, that we have to build a path for the data centers to be able to rely on.

The last piece is making sure that we have a plan for taking these data centers down because I believe that as technology continues to advance, we’re going to see an opportunity to not have these massive data centers and we want to make sure that we are protecting Wisconsin from those data centers just sitting there in the long run. We need to be able to pull them down and return to what was there before.

And then finally, we got to be able to walk away. Companies not wanting to be a partner with us? Then we have to have the ability to walk away and know that Wisconsin will have more opportunities for its economy to grow and with a strong governor like me, I’ll be able to find those opportunities.”



David Crowley

“I think the state of Wisconsin’s had a crossroad. We need to make a decision on whether or not we want these data centers. If we say no, especially without a framework, my biggest fear is these projects moving somewhere next door, moving to a Michigan, an Illinois, or Minnesota, who would have fewer protections, fewer regulations, and it’s still going to affect our air and water, because it doesn’t stop at the border.

But if we do make this decision that we’re at least open to these data centers, we need a framework, and quite honestly, we need to set the strongest standards in the entire country.

We need to make sure that every data center in Wisconsin will be required to be ran on 100% renewable energy, and make sure that they pay the full cost of any infrastructure upgrades.

They use union labor, that they meet strict environmental standards at the exact same time, because we have to protect our environment. And so, we will require them to enter into community benefit agreements as well. So not only local communities, but our entire state can really see those returns. Hopefully investing even more in our public infrastructure, our schools, and direct utility rate release for every single family.

I do believe it can provide an opportunity to grow our economy, but we have to make sure the framework is in there to do it responsibly, making sure that development works for the people, and not just the corporations who are building them.”



Joel Brennan

“In a rapidly changing landscape here, there are two things I would say that are certainties. One, when the state passed the tax credit to ensure that we could kind of get the table stakes and be in the data center business, I think the state should have then created guardrails, and some more predictability for everybody involved.

The second thing that’s a certainty is, the legislature is not gonna do anything about this between now and when one of us takes office next year. And that’s a problem. That’s a problem that the legislature is not doing anything.

And so, I have said, yes, I would be willing to take a pause in the first few months of my administration, but I don’t think we have a long way to go. There is legislation that has been proposed. I have had conversations as recently as this week with the authors of that legislation - that was done with stakeholders and input from lots of places around the state.

I even had a suggestion that, well, the Republican poison pill bill that would have been awful for everyone, that there were some aspects in it around transparency, around related to water, that are actually things that could be absorbed into that legislation.

So I don’t think this is something that we need to wait on forever. I think there needs to be predictability and transparency around this. I think we need to make sure that none of us and no taxpayers paying for the construction, the operation, the long term cost, the transmission, the getting rid of it, as Missy said. And we need to make sure that there are environmental standards, working conditions, what the local units of government have.

So I think we can do that in the early months of 2027 and move forward here.”



Sara Rodriguez

“I’ve been really clear that we need to have a floor for legislation for the data centers. Number one, this has to be an open conversation with the community. What community members are telling me is sometimes these data centers, they find out about them after the ink on the contract has already been signed. That there are NDAs, that they are not getting information from the community. That is unacceptable in the state of Wisconsin.

Number two, they have to pay enhanced rates for their electricity. Not only do they have to pay their full way, but we know there’s going to be pressure on our grid and additional maintenance costs. So we want to make sure that those data centers are paying for that.

And they need to invest in renewable energy. They want to build here in Wisconsin. You’ve got to invest in renewable energy here.

Secondly, if they’re gonna be using water, we have to know how much, and we have to know if they’re taking it out of our system, and they’re putting it back in, that it is at the same quality and the same temperature as they took it out. That’s the floor.

But communities can decide that they can have even more stringent regulations, or they can decide, you know what? We do not want to have data centers within our community. That should be okay.

We should unrestrict the local communities to make sure that they can do their own restrictions if they so choose. But we have to have that floor for statewide regulation. It’s that critical.”



Francesca Hong

“Yes, I support a pause, and this is paramount to ensure that we can allow communities to have community control, that we have a plan to invest in alternative energy, and that we are deleting the leading corporate subsidies, I said, control, alt, delete there. That is the plan.

We, right now, as outlined previously, do not have the enforcements that we need on polluters to hold them accountable. We need time to be able to implement the regulations and to protect our natural resources, and that is going to take time in the legislature to ensure that we can get to a place where communities feel safer and feel like they have the resources to make these decisions in their local communities.

No NDAs, ensuring that rate payers are not going to be seeing, it increases in their utility bills. We’ve also introduced a 2% rate cap bill, where we would ensure that rate payers do not pay more than 2% of their monthly salary.

And I think it’s critical that the moratorium bill that we have introduced that would put a pause on the construction of new AI data centers that, in order to have that ready on day one, we are meeting with stakeholders right now. Construction workers who have bought concerns to me that these are not only family sustaining jobs, but some of them have paid off their mortgages.

You know, it is critical right now, right now, to have that pause, to ensure that that moratorium gives us time to actually have the regulations in place before new AI data centers are constructed here in the state.”



Mandela Barnes

“It all comes down to regulation, and the tough part here is we had this conversation. You’re thinking about the most profitable companies in the entire world to ever exist. And if you think about social media, you think about big tech in general, the outsized influence that it has had on all of our lives.

The fact is it has happened that way because there has little to no regulation. There have been no guardrails. Social media has exacerbated the mental health crises, especially of our youth, has exacerbated political polarization, the list goes on and on and on.

The fact is, these data centers feel as if there’s some sort of physical manifestation of everything we have ever been worried about when it comes to them.

That being said, a stringent set of rules; regulation that includes conducting a statewide study before any new data center is constructed.

And with that study of the impacts, ensuring that there is a mechanism to evaluate even the regional impacts, and also to ensure that water usage is not going to impact or impede on water quality, ensuring that people’s utility rates will not go up.

And then the most important part is probably ongoing public reporting. So many people feel left in the dark. We have to ban the non disclosure agreements. We have to ensure that the public knows exactly what is going on every step of the way throughout the life cycle of that data center.”