

# 58th AD GOP primary candidates oppose raising gas tax, registration fees for roads

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None of the four Republican candidates in the conservative 58th Assembly District would support a 5 cent gas tax increase — even if offset by tax cuts elsewhere.

Higher vehicle registration fees, the primary opponents agreed in separate interviews with WisPolitics.com this week, are also off the table as part of a long-term transportation fix.

But one candidate — Trump conservative Spencer Zimmerman — says tolling, specifically along the state's southern border in an effort to target Illinois residents, is an option that should be explored.

Zimmerman, a 38-year-old chauffeur for Presidential Limousine Service and flight line technician at the Chicago Executive Airport, had first floated the idea back in 2015. Any vehicle with out-of-state license plates entering Wisconsin from the south, he says, would be subject to a \$3 toll — although state residents would be exempt.

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“I think it's time that we make Illinois help pay for Wisconsin roads because Wisconsin drivers have been helping pay for Illinois roads for decades driving on the Illinois tollways,” said the now five-time candidate, who challenged U.S. House Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Janesville, last year.

The other three, though, are largely opposed to tolling and instead call for finding greater efficiencies within the Department of Transportation.

That includes Steve Stanek, a 50 year-old West Bend hazardous waste transportation and environmental consulting business owner, who says the best thing the state can do is “be more efficient with our contracting process and our road building” rather than upping revenue.

Still, Stanek says he hasn’t ruled out tolling as an option, adding it’s something he needs to look into.

Stanek is the only GOP primary candidate in the race who has not previously run for office. But he did work on former U.S. Senate candidate Jeff Fitzgerald’s campaign in 2012, although Fitzgerald went on to lose a multi-candidate primary to former Gov. Tommy Thompson.

Of the others in the primary, Tiffany Koehler, 47 and a Slinger resident, ran for the seat in 2014, coming second in a three-way Republican primary to former Rep. Bob Gannon. And Rick Gundrum, a 61-year-old Village of Slinger trustee first elected in April 2009, has also served on the Washington County Board for the past 12 years. He also owns an audio and video production business — McKay Enterprises LLC.

Koehler over the last year worked as a legislative aide in Gannon’s office. That experience, she says, means she was “already doing the job” of taking care of the 58th AD, saying she would attend district events if Gannon had been unable to. After he passed away, she said, she continued to take care of the district until she took unpaid leave from her post to run for the seat.

“I know I have the relationships built here in the district with constituents, with business owners with other legislators... You need support if you want to get things done and I can get results based on — you know, I’m already doing the job,” she said.

The military veteran also says she’s for tax reform and supports eliminating the state income tax, adding that as a “fiscal hawk,” she thinks the “government is taking too much of our money.”

But Gundrum, a distant relative of appeals court judge and former state Rep. Mark Gundrum, says he’s different from the others because he’s served in office — and prioritized low tax rates and priority-based budgeting, moves he said have improved efficiencies and increased transparency.

“You know the other candidates will be saying that they are the most conservative and they should be elected because they are conservative,” he said. “But I am someone who has governed as a conservative. And like I said my record speaks for itself.”

Still, Zimmerman said while he lives in Janesville — but is currently eyeing a condo in Slinger — his experience growing up just north of the district as well as living in other places around the state and serving in the Air Force helps bring a “perspective that I would consider an advantage.”

He added the district needs a Trump conservative like himself “to carry on the policies of Bob Gannon,” noting that he supports term limits for lawmakers, as well as “strong tough on crime laws” to help “confront the crime wave that’s spilling over the border from Chicago” and legislation to ban sanctuary cities.

Zimmerman also knocked Koehler for “supporting Obamacare,” saying it’s a position that’s “not in line with the party.”

CNN in March of this year profiled Koehler, who was diagnosed two years ago with non-Hodgkin lymphoma, for her “change of heart” regarding the Affordable Care Act.

While she initially got health insurance through the Obamacare marketplace, she found the \$400 monthly bill was too high, and opted for Medicaid under the state’s BadgerCare Plus program.

But Koehler this week said she doesn’t support the ACA — and she’s particularly against the individual mandate. Still, she said, she’s against having lifetime caps on health insurance and supports coverage for pre-existing conditions.

“Gov. Walker and Wisconsin got it right by expanding BadgerCare Plus and that helped me desperately when I needed it,” she said.

Meanwhile, Stanek said his connection with the community through involvement in service groups, sports and the Rotary Club, is one of his strongest assets as he seeks to represent the area.

A WisPolitics.com check of Stanek’s donation history showed he previously donated \$3,000 to Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett’s gubernatorial campaign in October 2010 when he battled Gov. Scott Walker for the seat; as well as \$500 to former

Democratic state Senator Jeff Plale in September 2010.

But Stanek said he felt compelled to donate to the two Dem candidates due to his past position with the Milwaukee-based Alliance Federated Energy, where his boss “essentially held two fundraisers” encouraging employees to donate to both campaigns.

“Those were business decisions at the time but I don’t think you can read anything into those,” he said, noting he’d also donated to other GOP campaigns, including Gannon’s and the state GOP. He later left that position to start his own business.

Koehler, meanwhile, largely donated to herself and various GOP state, county and congressional parties, in addition to one donation to Republican Scott Espeseth, who ran unsuccessfully for the state Assembly in 2014, losing to Rep. Daniel Riemer, D-Milwaukee.

Gundrum has no record of donating, while Zimmerman previously gave to himself and the Dane County Republican Party.

On other issues:

\*Foxconn: The four all said they supported the state’s deal with the Taiwanese manufacturer, and none said they would look to make changes to the final contract Gov. Scott Walker and Foxconn Chairman and CEO Terry Gou signed off on last month.

\*Constitutional carry: Zimmerman, Gundrum and Koehler said they would support a GOP effort to allow the carrying of a concealed weapon without a permit.

Stanek, a concealed carry permit owner, said he “fully supports” the concealed carry law as it is now, and would need to do more research on the bill before deciding if he backs it.

The primary is Dec. 19. The winner will go on to face Dem and former president and CEO of Glacier Hills Credit Union Dennis Degenhardt, of West Bend, in the general election on Jan. 16.

Hear the interviews, some of which were edited to delete comments made off the record:

\*Zimmerman: [https://soundcloud.com/wispolitics/171130\\_zimmerman/s-WiXNx](https://soundcloud.com/wispolitics/171130_zimmerman/s-WiXNx)

\*Stanek: [https://soundcloud.com/wispolitics/171130\\_stanek/s-jGaDc](https://soundcloud.com/wispolitics/171130_stanek/s-jGaDc)

\*Koehler: [https://soundcloud.com/wispolitics/171130\\_koehler/s-zLz9o](https://soundcloud.com/wispolitics/171130_koehler/s-zLz9o)

\*Gundrum: [https://soundcloud.com/wispolitics/171130\\_gundrum/s-fPuod](https://soundcloud.com/wispolitics/171130_gundrum/s-fPuod)