

Dems vying for 66th AD share similar views, highlight different backgrounds

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The two Dem candidates vying for the 66th AD in Racine both say they would have voted against the Foxconn deal on the Assembly floor — a bill that the seat's current occupant, Rep. Cory Mason, voted to support.

That's because, the two said in separate interviews with WisPolitics.com this week, they would have liked to see stronger environmental protections, a guaranteed minimum wage, union contracts and other provisions surrounding local and diverse hiring.

Both also said if they won election, they'd work to ensure their constituents benefited positively from the deal.

For Great Neubauer, 26, that includes advocating for resources for job training and public transportation.

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"If we are going to be putting \$3 billion of taxpayer money into this deal, we need to make sure that people in Racine get those jobs," she said.

Neubauer, who's the daughter of former Racine Rep. Jeff Neubauer, most recently worked in Mason's Madison office as a research assistant, where she had a hand in the state budget, Foxconn and more. Meanwhile, fellow primary candidate John Tate II, 33, has been serving as a Racine city alder since his April election. Both are currently full-time candidates and both live in Racine.

The primary is one of three special elections Tuesday to fill recent vacancies in the

Legislature created by: Mason's election as mayor, Sheila Harsdorf's move to head the state ag department and the death of GOP Rep. Bob Gannon. In the 66th AD, no Republican candidate is running, meaning the primary winner will effectively win the seat.

Neubauer and Tate see eye-to-eye on many issues and can point to past experiences working on campaigns. But Tate says his background in social work has allowed him to work with people from all socio-economic levels and has given him insight into how policy and government "can influence and affect a person's circumstances."

Those experiences working with people who "really need to have their voice amplified in Madison" make him "particularly and uniquely qualified to represent the district," he said.

And Tate, who's African American, said because the district is a majority-minority one, it's important to elect officials like him who "understand that experience," especially giving the current level of "divisiveness based on racial lines and ethnic lines."

The last African American representative of the district was former Rep. Robert Turner, who served for 22 years in the Assembly.

Meanwhile, before working in Mason's office from August until she resigned to run for his seat in November, Neubauer headed the nonprofit environmental group Fossil Fuel Divestment Student Network, now called the Sunrise Movement.

Neubauer said her past 10 years working as an organizer and on campaigns — which started at 16 when she helped organize Racine High School Students for Obama during the 2008 presidential campaign — will help her "be an effective advocate for people in this community."

"I really do think we have an opportunity in this moment, and I intend if I'm elected to use this position to lift up the organizing work and leadership already happening in this community," she said.

On other issues:

*Opportunity Schools and Partnership Program: Both candidates said they would seek to repeal the OSPP, which was initially created in the last budget and targets

underperforming school districts, offering the potential for a state takeover. But the current biennial budget also sets up a process for area villages to form their own school districts, rather than going into the OSPP.

Tate said letting villages vote to create their own districts would only re-segregate Racine-area schools.

"I think it's completely unnecessary," he said. "If it ever were to be fully enacted, what the end result will be a segregated school district, which has a majority white students with a higher tax base and more funding and a majority-minority school districts with higher needs and fewer resources and much more poverty."

*Constitutional carry: Both candidates said they'd oppose a bill that would allow for concealed carry without a permit.

While Neubauer said she sees hunting as "an important part of our culture here in Wisconsin" and supports the Second Amendment, she added doesn't think there's a need to roll back regulations around gun safety or concealed carry.

"I think we need to be making sure that we have every regulation in place to make sure that we have gun safety laws that are able to be enforced," she said.

*Transportation funding: Neubauer said she was against both tolling and higher vehicle registration fees but could support indexing the gas tax.

But she said she wouldn't back a 5 cent gas tax increase, saying it would hit low-income people harder than those who are better off.

"Generally I think we need to be focusing on taxing the wealthy and corporations rather than imposing regressive taxes," she said. "So we if we are able to give the kind of tax cuts to the wealthy that Scott Walker has given we need to be very careful about imposing taxes that will hit low income people the hardest."

Tate, meanwhile, said he's not opposed to raising the gas tax, although he's not sure what the right amount is — but he's open to considering anything under 9 cents.

While he called a gas tax increase "much more palatable" than a vehicle registration fee upper, Tate said lawmakers would still need to consider the length of time to impose the tax "because I would be concerned with indefinite increases

without a clear rationale as to why.”

And he said tolling is off the table, adding that if tolling was implemented along the state’s southern border, it would hit Wisconsinites harder than those living out-of-state.

Tate also backs investing greater state funds into regional transportation systems, including buses, trains and high-speed rail.

“If we can find more cost-effective ways to get people to and from the places that they work, the roads can last longer and our environment can be healthier,” he said.

Hear the audio:

Neubauer: https://soundcloud.com/wispolitics/171211_neubauer/s-ahv41

Tate: https://soundcloud.com/wispolitics/171212_tate/s-HJrwK