

Evers, Holtz differ on Act 10, Walker's budget at WisPolitics.com forum

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http://www.wiseye.org/mp4stream/EVT/EVT_170227_EVERS_HOLTZ.mp4

Candidates for state superintendent at a WisPolitics.com forum in Milwaukee disagreed about Gov. Scott Walker's plan to make a proposed boost in per-pupil school aid contingent on compliance with Act 10.

Walker's plan would increase per-pupil aid by \$200 the first year and \$204 the second year of his budget, but schools would have to comply with Act 10 provisions such as requiring teachers to pay 12 percent of the cost of their health plans.

"That to me is a significant overreach by the state," State Superintendent Tony Evers said during the forum, held Feb. 27 at UW-Milwaukee's Zilber School of Public Health.

He noted Monona Grove teachers were paying 12 percent, but the district achieved savings by switching plans and subsequently reduced the amount staff had to contribute.

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"Is that right as a state to say: 'Well, you shouldn't be doing that?'" Evers said.

Evers' challenger, Lowell Holtz, likened it to having to follow the speed limit.

"You have to follow the letter of the law," Holtz said. "You can't have ... fully independent districts that don't follow the law."

Holtz, who recently retired as superintendent of the Whitnall School District, praised

Walker's education budget overall, particularly provisions to help rural districts with transportation issues and to move to lifetime licensing for teachers.

Holtz said as a principal some of his best teachers were those with lifetime licenses.

"When you give teachers the opportunity to do what they do best, which is teach, they fly — they do a great job with our kids," Holtz said.

Evers also praised the budget's increased per-pupil investment in K-12, but said rather than the funds be given equally to districts, those like Milwaukee and elsewhere with students who have greater needs should get a larger share.

"Usually if kids need an extra lift, they need some extra resources," Evers said.

Evers said lifetime licensing is something that needs a deeper look, but expressed some reservations, noting that licensing now carries professional development requirements.

But he noted some districts that have lifetime licensing are doing well.

"I'm not sure that's a statewide issue," Evers said. "I need to think about that."

The two also expressed different views about new Education Secretary Betsy DeVos.

Holtz said he was hopeful President Trump and DeVos would follow through on giving states more control over education.

"I welcome that with open arms, because I don't want D.C. dictating what we're doing in Wisconsin," Holtz said. "I want Wisconsin to choose their path moving forward, and I do think that she's going to help us with that."

Evers, who noted DeVos is a proponent of voucher schools, said he was "fearful" about how she will use her "bully pulpit" as secretary.

He said if DeVos comes to Milwaukee to visit a high-achieving voucher school, she should also visit public schools.

"She better go to both," Evers said. "And she better talk about both in a positive way. She represents all kids, all 680,000 public school kids in the state of Wisconsin,

and we need her to be an advocate for those kids.”

Holtz and Evers shared common ground, however, on wanting to repeal a law backed by the tourism industry that prohibits schools from starting before Sept. 1.

“I would like to see the schools have the flexibility to do more year-round types of school programs,” Holtz said, noting some students regress over a long summer.

“There are so many creative things our schools can do when they have local control,” Holtz said. “We have great instructional leaders, great superintendents and great teachers. They can come up with a plan where they’re going to increase learning opportunities for kids.”

Evers also said he would like to see the law repealed, noting he proposed in his budget request Milwaukee Public Schools be exempt from the requirement. He said Walker did not include that exemption, but that DPI found ways to exempt high schools in Milwaukee from the law.

“I have to tell you it makes absolutely no sense if we want our districts to be as flexible as we can,” Evers said.

He said he will continue to advocate for repeal and look for ways to help other districts get around the requirement where possible.