

State Superintendent Evers formally launches gov bid

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State Superintendent Tony Evers, formally launching his bid for governor, tells WisPolitics.com he'd be open to raising the gas tax to address Wisconsin's long-term transportation needs while pulling back on some credits for businesses to ensure the state can invest in priorities like education.

Evers said unlike Scott Walker, who has rejected an increase in the gas tax or registration fees as part of budget negotiations, he would not be the kind of chief executive to pull any solutions off the table. Instead, he would seek bipartisan solutions to issues like transportation.

He also rejected the notion that makes him a tax-and-spend liberal, especially if it's coming from those now pushing a \$3 billion deal for electronics manufacturer Foxconn to locate in Wisconsin.

"Tax and spend, that's just baloney, quite frankly," Evers said in an interview ahead of Wednesday's formal announcement. "Who's just passing a \$3 billion bill and not consider themselves a tax and spend person? I mean, clearly, we're spending money."

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Evers has been critical of the Foxconn bill, particularly the projection from the Legislative Fiscal Bureau that Wisconsin would not break even for 25 years on the increased tax revenue it may see from the project compared to the incentives it would provide the Taiwanese manufacturer.

Evers said if elected, he would look to renegotiate with the company, including on family-supporting wages and how much of its workforce is comprised of Wisconsin workers vs. those from out of state.

Walker has suggested he needs to be re-elected in 2018 to ensure the company completes the deal with Wisconsin. But Evers said the company “won’t be thrown out of the state by anyone” elected next year and he believes Wisconsin can “balance the books as far as taxes and credits and making sure we have tax fairness.”

“I see the Walker administration talking about, well, some details are going to be worked out after the budget. Well, some of these details can be worked out after the next election,” Evers said

Evers, who said he was “diametrically opposed” to Act 10, said he will not campaign on repealing Walker’s signature accomplishment in dramatically cutting the collective bargaining powers of most public employees.

Evers said he would sign a repeal if it hit his desk. But he said it was unrealistic to promise a repeal because the chances were so slim such legislation would reach him.

Instead, Evers said one of his first goals would be to make sure all public employees feel valued and have the opportunity to make impacts on the agencies and schools where they work.

That could include, for example, creating agencies at state councils to give employees input on their work environments.

“The fact of the matter is this campaign cannot be about Act 10,” Evers said. “It has to be about making sure that our employees are treated fairly and have a voice in what happens in their organizations and have opportunities to be leaders in their organizations.”

Evers, 65, won his third term as Department of Public Instruction superintendent this spring with 70 percent of the vote. He served as deputy superintendent under Libby Burmaster before winning his first election in 2009 after she did not run again. He has spent his career in education, including stints at the local level as a principal and school district administrator.

The state GOP, meanwhile, is already going after Evers with a digital ad that knocks him over the DPI’s decision to allow a Middleton teacher to keep his license after he was fired for looking at sexually explicit images at school. Arbitrators ruled the

district wrongly fired the teacher, and DPI found while his conduct was highly inappropriate, it did not meet the legal definition of immoral conduct as the law was then written.

The digital ad reads, “Madison bureaucrat Tony Evers left child in danger.” The spot leads to a website hitting Evers.

State GOP spokesman Alec Zimmerman said Wednesday Evers has failed to lead when children needed him.

“While Governor Walker has fought for hard-working Wisconsin families and delivered results, Tony Evers has repeatedly failed to stand up — even allowing a teacher to remain in the classroom while spreading pornographic material in school.”

Evers rejected the accusation and turned it around on Walker, saying that case is not hurting kids “as much as Gov. Walker has done with Lincoln Hills,” referencing the state’s troubled youth prison in northern Wisconsin.

Evers said the agency followed the law in determining the teacher should keep his license. But it then worked with the Legislature to have the law changed with bipartisan support.

Lincoln Hills, has been under criminal investigation over allegations of inmate abuse.

“It’s hurting kids. It’s hurting a significant number of kids,” Evers said.

Zimmerman also knocked Evers for DPI being unable to accurately report the graduation rate for 2015-16 after a data-reporting error.

At his campaign kick off Wednesday in Fitchburg, Evers said it’s a “foolish comment” for the gov or anyone else to suggest he has not competently run DPI or doesn’t know the graduation rate.

He acknowledged errors in the reporting this year, but said DPI has a “close approximation” of the rate, which he said continues to be high.

“If he wants to dispute high graduation rates, he has a problem there,” Evers said.

Listen to the interview:

<https://soundcloud.com/wispolitics/170822evers/s-607EV>