

59th AD GOP primary candidates share transportation funding ideas

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One of the Republicans looking to replace outgoing Rep. Jesse Kremer says he would look into implementing a heavy truck fee as part of a transportation funding solution.

But Ken Depperman, 68 and retired, expressed hesitation over only raising the gas tax hike or increasing registration fees. He said upping either means the burden “falls on the little guy” and that reaching a solution equates to looking at “everything in totality.”

Rep. Amy Loudenbeck during last summer’s budget talks floated a mileage-based fee on heavy trucks. The proposal initially appeared to gain traction, but ran into opposition in the Senate and from several businesses groups, including Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce and Americans for Prosperity-Wisconsin.

Depperman said while there would be pushback that such a fee could raise prices, “this is all the cost of doing business.”

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“This is a situation where we have to get everyone involved, not just throwing all the brunt of the responsibilities on the little guy, and making the average Joe pay more in sales taxes and let the trucking companies continue to ride down the roads and continue to do the heavy damage that they’re doing,” he said.

Three of the four GOP candidates running in the 59th AD spoke with WisPolitics.com this week, though Ty Bodden, of St. Cloud, missed his scheduled interview and didn’t return subsequent phone calls, an email or a text message.

Rachel Mixon, 43 and a longtime teacher at the private Brookfield Academy, called

for getting rid of prevailing wage — the state has approved the repeal of it on public projects — and ensuring projects are efficiently prioritized within the Department of Transportation.

She also suggested trimming off “extra necessities” from certain road projects, such as cutting out sidewalks where it’s safe to do so in the rural districts.

And Mixon expressed opposition to tolling and raising the gas tax and vehicle registration fees.

“I will say this again, raising taxes is the easiest solution, it’s the laziest solution and it’s not the right solution,” she said. “It’s an ultimate last resort.”

Timothy Ramthun, 61 and an executive business management consultant at National Consulting, said if elected he would first want to get an updated analysis from DOT before committing to a specific path forward.

Still, he signalled an openness to considering indexing the gas tax and raising vehicle registration fees, though he said tolling is off the table.

“I’m not a tax fan ...” Ramthun said. “We have to make sure it’s the right thing to do, and if it has a scalable element of success, then it’s worth talking about.”

Each of the candidates currently holds local elected office. Ramthun, who ran for the 59th AD in 2014 but lost a four-way primary to Kremer, is a member of the Kewaskum School District Board of Education. Mixon is a City of Hartford alder. Bodden, who previously worked as Kremer’s campaign manager, serves on the Stockbridge Village Board. And Depperman is on the Fond du Lac County Board of Supervisors and chair for the Town of Auburn and Town of Auburn Planning Commission.

On other topics:

*Constitutional carry: Depperman said he would “absolutely not” support a bill to allow someone to carry a concealed weapon without first obtaining a permit or going through any training.

Mixon said she’d lean toward supporting it, noting “other states have constitutional carry, and it does work there.”

And Ramthun said he thinks there should be “some training aspect,” but was noncommittal on the issue, noting he might back it based on the Second Amendment. Still, he signaled support for other elements of the bill, which a group of Republicans introduced earlier this session, including allowing schools to post signs on their buildings and grounds banning weapons while eliminating the state’s school gun-free school zone law.

“I want the choice to be allowed and then let the local school districts decide if they want to have it or not, implement it or not,” he said, adding that such a change should apply to parochial, private and public schools.

Ramthun noted the effort could have been rolled into the broader school safety legislation that cleared the Legislature this spring. While he applauded the focus on building improvements under the first round of grants, he added having “internal deterrent factors, i.e. concealed carry, would probably be icing on the cake.”

*UW System tuition freeze: The candidates were largely split on continuing the tuition freeze, which Gov. Scott Walker recently said he’d want to continue if he re-elected.

Depperman called for investing more funding into the UW System, but was uncertain whether the freeze should be continued.

Mixon, meanwhile, said she was leaning toward continuing the freeze, but said it shouldn’t be on the taxpayers to fund it.

And Ramthun said he would like to see the freeze continue for another year or two “to see how things are going” but added he would need more information and context to understand the “strategic value” of continuing it before committing to a path forward.

Hear Depperman’s interview:

<https://soundcloud.com/wispolitics/candidate-interview-with-ken-depperman>

Hear Mixon’s:

<https://soundcloud.com/wispolitics/candidate-interview-with-rachel-mixon>

Hear Ramthun’s:

<https://soundcloud.com/wispolitics/candidate-interview-with-tim-ramthun>