

# 62nd AD GOP candidates share ideas on transpo funding, uses for online sales tax revenue

Posted on Friday, Jul 20, 2018

More than a year after state Rep. Dale Kooyenga released his sweeping tax and transportation plan, Republican 62nd AD candidate Robert Wittke is still talking about it.

Wittke cited the Brookfield Republican's calls to reduce the gas tax and apply the sales tax to fuel, for example. And the 60-year-old Racine Unified School Board president praised it and other provisions as a means of kick-starting a much-needed conversation about stabilizing funding going forward, as well as providing more opportunities for economic growth.

"Overall what I like is the fact that it is a plan that was brought forward to begin a discussion," he said. "And I think that's how we will find solutions that benefit the taxpayers of Wisconsin."

The plan came up as Wittke was weighing options for funding roads in an interview this week with WisPolitics.com. While he was unclear about whether he'd push for aspects of the plan himself should he win a seat in the Assembly, he highlighted another piece of the proposal: moving the state from four brackets to a flat tax of 3.95 percent as part of an overhaul of the tax code.

**>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

Kooyenga, a member of the Joint Finance Committee, unveiled the wide-ranging plan in the midst of a budget cycle bogged down by debates over what to do about the transportation budget and K-12. Among the other provisions Kooyenga outlined are: stopping local governments from enacting new wheel taxes; and allowing local

governments to impose a sales tax for road work via referendum.

As for other funding solutions — vehicle registration fees and tolling — Wittke said those ideas “need to be evaluated fiscally and in a relationship with each other.” And with his background in finance and accounting, he says he’s just the right person to do that.

Wittke is one of two GOP contenders looking to succeed Rep. Thomas Weatherston, R-Caledonia, in the state Assembly. Weatherston in April announced he wouldn’t seek re-election.

Meanwhile, fellow Republican John Leiber, 40 and a full-time candidate for office, called for overhauling the way the state does vehicle registration fees.

Instead of a flat rate, he said, lawmakers should looking into restructuring the system — the way other states do it.

“I think we should kind of look and see how other states are approaching this same issue, because this isn’t something that’s unique to Wisconsin, this is something that these states are dealing with in some form or another,” Leiber said.

And he said he doesn’t support upping the gas tax, noting that as cars become more fuel-efficient, the tax “isn’t a sustainable way to fund transportation.”

“Ultimately I really don’t want to see tax increases to pay for roads because I feel that we should use our existing taxes that we’re already collecting to somehow fund roads,” he said.

Leiber also expressed skepticism for tolling, saying with the need for federal approval and establishing the infrastructure, the option “really doesn’t solve anything now.”

The former president of the Caledonia Parks and Recreation Commission and previous commissioner on the Housing Authority of Racine County, Leiber ran unsuccessfully for office twice before: Caledonia Village Board in 2012; and Racine Unified School Board in 2008.

But he also spent four years working in Weatherston’s office, and ran Weatherston’s first campaign for Assembly in 2012.

That combination of state and local experience, he said, makes him the best candidate in the race.

“I think because this is such an important time in Racine County,” he said, referencing the Foxconn deal, “we need someone with the experience and the ability to commit their full time to this.”

Wittke, who hasn’t sought other offices besides school board, played up his three years holding a local office and his more than 25 years of work in the tax and finance industry as reasons he would be the district’s ideal rep.

“I’ve got the public industry experience, I’ve got a finance and accounting background. I’ve held local elected office here dealing with a \$320 million budget, have been head on into the challenges that the state will be facing as we continue to grow and as the huge manufacturing investment in our area begins to take shape, there will be a lot of peripheral industries” making relationships with area governments and tech colleges key, he said.

Along with their different backgrounds, the two candidates also split over Gov. Scott Walker’s plan to use the money collected from online sales taxes to offset the tax burden elsewhere.

The U.S. Supreme Court recently ruled states can collect online sales taxes from sellers not physically located in the state. Wisconsin will begin collecting those taxes in October, the gov’s office has said, and the Legislative Fiscal Bureau estimates \$90 million will be collected for rest of this fiscal year and \$120 million for the full fiscal year going forward.

Leiber said while Walker’s plan is a “good place to start,” he called for waiting to spend the revenue — revenue, he added, that the state “should have been collecting all along” — until the budget bill is introduced to assess the situation.

“I don’t want to start spending every single dollar we get in as soon as it’s predicted, I think we need to see where is the budget at?” he said. “Because I don’t want to just spend all that money and have to borrow it somewhere else. So I do want to get that money before we spend it.”

Wittke said while he generally agrees with Walker’s approach to reducing taxes and providing a better environment for businesses and individuals in the state, he said

he'd also be open to investing some or all of the revenue in other areas.

That includes using the money for K-12 or higher ed in order to support “an appropriate workforce for the future.”

On other issues:

\*UW-System tuition freeze: Both said they'd support continuing the five-year cap on tuition, citing the importance of keeping costs of higher ed low for students and their families.

\*Constitutional carry: The two also said they would back legislation that would allow someone to carry a concealed weapon without first obtaining a permit or going through any training if it comes back around and they're in the Legislature.

“I think (the) constitutional carry bill would make sense at this point,” Leiber said, adding that he encourages those thinking about carrying concealed to get training, though that's not something he said the state needs to mandate.

“There are so many different training courses out there, I believe leaving it up to the gun owner to be responsible is the best course,” he said.

Hear Wittke's interview:

[https://soundcloud.com/wispolitics/180718\\_wittke](https://soundcloud.com/wispolitics/180718_wittke)

Hear Leiber's:

[https://soundcloud.com/wispolitics/180718\\_leiber/s-qgnxT](https://soundcloud.com/wispolitics/180718_leiber/s-qgnxT)