

Baldwin, Vukmir clash on immigration, Kavanaugh nomination in second debate

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WAUSAU — GOP Senate candidate Leah Vukmir on Saturday accused U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin of supporting open borders and allowing Mexican gang members to cross freely into the U.S.

Baldwin, meanwhile, charged Vukmir was so obsessed with supporting President Trump's plans to build a wall that she's unwilling to take steps that would help Wisconsin dairy farmers who rely on immigrant labor.

The two clashed on immigration after a question posed to Vukmir, a GOP state senator from Brookfield, on the challenges facing dairy farmers who rely on immigrant labor. The question noted Vukmir's past comments that the president's proposed wall must be built before anything is done on immigration.

Vukmir said she's the daughter of Greek immigrants and stands with Trump in his calls for a wall.

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"Her idea of a border would be drawing a line in the dirt with a wink and a nod," Vukmir said.

Baldwin, D-Madison, called the immigration system broken and noted she worked with Dems and Republicans to pass a comprehensive immigration overhaul that would have added 20,000 new border agents, created a pathway to citizenship for "dreamers" and addressed agricultural visa issues.

On the latter point, she said the bill sought to change the visas so they weren't only

good for planting and harvesting seasons, noting dairy farmers need to milk their cows every day. Baldwin added the state lost some 500 farms last year, in part, due to the instability in the workforce.

“Unfortunately my opponent won’t even look at this until they build a wall,” Baldwin said.

The Dem also called the Trump administration’s changes to asylum laws “despicable” and expressed opposition to the president’s past policy of separating families at the border. She said there was a different situation during the Obama administration that also involved unaccompanied children coming to the border and she asked questions then about how to handle the crisis.

“We don’t put children in cages like this president has done, and we can’t even look at doing that again,” Baldwin declared.

Vukmir countered she never heard any outrage from Baldwin about the Obama administration’s approach to immigrant families at the border and said it’s part of a pattern of Dems simply trying to obstruct anything Trump does.

“You never did anything,” Vukmir said. “But now because it’s President Trump, you want to go on the attack. There is nothing President Trump will do that you will support.”

Later in the debate, Baldwin noted she agrees with the president on “buy American” policies and renegotiating trade agreements.

Asked for any areas in which she disagreed with the president, Vukmir offered none.

“I’m giving the president an ‘A’ so far,” Vukmir said.

Saturday was the second of three debates scheduled for the U.S. Senate race.

Sponsored by the Wisconsin Broadcasters Association, the debate included a panel that posed questions to the candidates and a moderator who cut them off if they went over their allotted time. The moderator also pressed them to directly address questions if they didn’t during their 90 seconds for responses.

The two also clashed on the president’s nomination of Brett Kavanaugh to the U.S. Supreme Court with Vukmir accusing Baldwin of “cheapening the #MeToo

movement” with her actions on the nomination, because nothing corroborated the allegations against the nominee.

Vukmir said she believed something happened to Christine Blasey Ford, who accused Kavanaugh of assaulting her. But she added the #MeToo movement requires “that we hear from the woman who’s made the allegation and we give due process to the person who was accused.”

She charged Baldwin refused to even meet with Kavanaugh, asking “Where is the due process in that?”

Vukmir went on to accuse Baldwin of missing votes and hearings in Washington, D.C., charging she has a pattern of failing to do her job.

Baldwin shot back that Vukmir was “lying again” and her voting attendance was the best of Wisconsin’s House and Senate delegation at 99.6 percent. In contrast, she said Vukmir failed to show for seven of the 10 state opioid task force hearings.

Baldwin said she reviewed Kavanaugh’s past writings and immediately had concerns that he wouldn’t be a fair, impartial, independent voice on the court. Still, Baldwin said she asked the White House more than a half-dozen times to meet with Kavanaugh but was rebuffed.

Baldwin said she found Ford to be a credible witness. In addition, she raised concerns about Kavanaugh’s past writings that a president should be immune from some legal actions while in office.

“No wonder this president nominated him,” Baldwin said.

On other issues:

Abortion: As they did in their Monday debate, each sought to portray the other as extreme on abortion. Asked what they would do if the Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion were overturned, Baldwin first knocked Vukmir, saying her opponent supported measures that would ban in vitro fertilization procedures, stem cell research, and access to abortion even in cases of rape and incest.

Pressed by the moderator what she would do if the decision were overturned, Baldwin said she would try to pass laws at the federal level to “protect a woman’s right to control her own body.” But she noted the immediate impact would be at the

state level.

Vukmir took a shot at Baldwin, questioning how “you put your head on your pillow at night” supporting partial-birth abortion. Also pressed by the moderator on what she would do if the decision were overturned, Vukmir answered, “Abortion is wrong. What can I say? Abortion is wrong. There are other choices.”

Marijuana

Baldwin said she plans to support a Dane County advisory referendum asking voters if they would like to see marijuana legalized, taxed and regulated as alcohol is now for adults 21 and over. She also said she was open to changing marijuana to a schedule 2 drug rather than schedule 1. The change, she said, would allow research to determine if there's medical value to the drug, which could then be used as an alternative to more addictive opioids and other pain medications.

Vukmir, though, said the Department of Drug Enforcement says marijuana is highly addictive, more so than meth and other drugs.

Vukmir added she has serious concerns about the legalization of marijuana, warning it could make the nation's drug problems worse and raising concerns about the possible impact on young people.

“I'm not willing to take that risk,” she said.