

Degenhardt stresses fiscal responsibility, connection to 'everyday people' in 58th AD bid

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The Dem candidate for former GOP Rep. Bob Gannon's seat says his decades of experience "working for everyday people" helps set him apart from his Republican opponent.

Dennis Degenhardt, the former president and CEO of Glacier Hills Credit Union, spent 39 years in the credit union industry — a resume item he says not only has made him fiscally responsible but also able to "understand working people and their needs."

Those needs, he said in a WisPolitics.com interview this week, don't include continuing to cut taxes — a topic his opponent, Rick Gundrum, has touted.

Gundrum, the 61-year-old Village of Slinger trustee and Washington County Board member, previously told WisPolitics.com that in those positions, he's prioritized low tax rates and priority-based budgeting. He won a four-way primary last month, advancing to face Degenhardt on Jan. 16 for the 58th Assembly District seat.

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But Degenhardt, 68 and Washington County Dem Party vice president, said there's a limit as to how far taxes can be cut, as he knocked Republicans for "failing to invest in Wisconsin."

"I believe in fiscal responsibility," he said. "Cutting taxes is not the answer to all questions, and if you pay for nothing what do you get? I think we learned this a long time ago; we get nothing."

Among Degenhardt's top issues are: access to affordable health care; raising the minimum wage; creating family supporting jobs; and pumping more money into public schools. He acknowledged while Gov. Scott Walker's current budget upped funding for both K-12 and higher ed, he said the increase doesn't make up for the lack of funding in previous years.

Meanwhile, on transportation, Degenhardt said lawmakers first need to look at the bid process to make it more open and competitive, which he said would help reign in costs. He also pointed to the Zoo Interchange project as an example of "runaway costs."

"We have to get control of these costs before we even analyze how we go forward," he said.

From there, Degenhardt said, he'd be open to considering further steps, including a gas tax hike, higher vehicle registration fees and tolling.

"I think everything should be on the table," he said.

Degenhardt also said he'd oppose a bill that would allow people to carry concealed weapons without a permit, saying current law works and gun safety training is important.

And Degenhardt said he's hoping the state uses the Foxconn deal as a learning opportunity. He was bothered by the "rushed" process that prioritized "good politics, not good governing."

"How do we look at these contracts, how do we get more debate?" he said. "This thing was kind of shoved down everybody's throats real fast. We didn't have a good statewide debate. There are people in other parts of the state who hate this thing because this is Racine County. It's not going to help people up in Marshfield."

And while Degenhardt said the idea of 13,000 new jobs is exciting, he questioned whether they would ever fully materialize, adding he'd be open to tweak the contract if possible.

"If we can change something that looks fishy or put some other guarantees in, I think we should look at it," he said.

Hear the audio:

<https://soundcloud.com/wispolitics/degenhardt/s-R3FKm>

See a previous WisPolitics.com interview with Gundrum:

<https://www.wispolitics.com/2017/58th-ad-gop-primary-candidates-oppose-raising-gas-tax-registration-fees-for-roads/>