

Dem gov candidates knock Foxconn deal, pledge to cut prison population during first televised debate

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Dem candidates for governor, meeting Thursday for the first time in a televised debate ahead of next month's primary, slammed the state's incentive package for Foxconn and pledged to reduce the Wisconsin's prison population.

They also prodded each other on women's rights and one even asked a rival his favorite beer.

The eight candidates took a few shots at each other in the debate, but largely avoided any serious blows.

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The moderators asked the candidates several yes or no questions, including whether they would seek to kill the state's \$3.5 billion state package for Foxconn, which is building a plant in Racine County to build LCD panels. Only state Superintendent Tony Evers and attorney Josh Pade didn't raise their hands to indicate their support for nixing the deal.

Later, Milwaukee attorney Matt Flynn pressed Evers on the package. Declaring he would "kill the Foxconn deal," Flynn noted Evers has no experience as a commercial litigator and suggested he was just repeating what he'd heard from others.

Evers countered it was a "horrible deal" and "we're giving them way too much." He supported reworking the contract.

"The bottom line is we have to have a plan 'B'," Evers said. "I can't sit up here and

tell the people of Wisconsin, by the way, this isn't going to happen. They're already there. Since they're already there, we have to make sure the people of Wisconsin are treated fairly."

The eight candidates stood behind podiums on a stage at UW-Milwaukee in the debate hosted by a media coalition that included WTMJ-TV, WUWM-FM, WGBA-TV, WisPolitics.com, the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel and the USA Today Network. WTMJ news anchors Charles Benson and Shannon Sims, along with WUWM's Mitch Teich, posed questions to the candidates, focusing on the same topic to only a couple of participants before moving onto other issues. In addition to asking yes or no questions via a show of hands, the debate included a period in which the candidates asked each other questions.

Flynn was asked about calls from Dem state Reps. Melissa Sargent and Chris Taylor, both of Madison, to drop out of the race due to his defense of the Archdiocese during the priest sexual abuse scandal.

He defended his work, saying he helped ensure the problems don't happen again, and said the two were repeating Republican lies and dismissed calls from what he said is the party "elite" to leave the race.

Sargent fired back on Twitter that she wasn't "afraid of a bully."

"@ForwardWFlynn represents the old guard establishment and the Democratic Party of 30 years ago. He's having a hissy fit because two progressive, women leaders are calling him out for shielding priests who raped children. @ChrisTaylorWI @RepSargent," she wrote.

Several candidates in the race have indicated their support for halving Wisconsin's prison population. Benson noted the Department of Corrections says two-thirds of offenders now incarcerated are violent and pressed former state Rep. Kelda Roys which of those prisoners she would release.

"It's not about who we're releasing. It's about making sure people receive just punishment for their crimes," Roys said, adding the state needs to address things like substance abuse for those incarcerated to help them successfully transition into society after their release.

Mahlon Mitchell, the chief of the statewide firefighters' union, said he wants to end

truth-in-sentencing, which largely eliminated parole to ensure those sentenced serve the full terms they receive. He also wants to eliminate crimeless parole revocations. Mitchell, the only African-American in the field, noted he's raising two black children in the worst state in the country to do so. He also took a shot at Gov. Scott Walker for his plan to move to regional youth prisons after allegations of abuse at a facility in northern Wisconsin.

"We have two Walkers. We have Gov. Walker who legislates and governs one way, and we have candidate Walker who's now acting like a moderate Republican," Mitchell said.

He also said Walker "doesn't give a" before a pause and adding "crap about the people of Wisconsin."

Pade said he would ensure that people such as low-level drug offenders are not sent to prison and that opportunities exist to help ensure people don't take up a life of crime. He also said he would make changes to parole and the way prisoners are reintegrated into society. He said he also supports allowing people to have their records expunged at any time. Currently, the opportunity to have a record expunged is only offered at sentencing.

Madison Mayor Paul Soglin said he would refuse a request from Trump to send National Guard troops to the U.S.- Mexico border.

"It's not going to happen on my watch in the state of Wisconsin," Soglin said, later adding, "because we are not sharing those values of hate and distrust and divisiveness that Donald Trump, with the compliance of Scott Walker, brings to this country."

During a section where candidates could ask each other questions, Mitchell asked McCabe what his favorite beer was, after asking, and then scratching, a question about what McCabe would do to bridge the rural-urban divide.

McCabe replied Spotted Cow, then addressed rural-urban divide issue. McCabe noted he grew up on a dairy farm, but said he tells those in rural areas that the state can't do well if Milwaukee is failing, and that rural areas must also succeed to help the state succeed.

Pade asked Roys what she would do for women if elected.

Roys said she has been “a champion of women’s rights” throughout her career.

“I cannot believe the type of peril that we are facing right now, where it looks like my daughters may have fewer rights than my mother and my grandmother,” Roys said.

She blasted Trump, saying he was “hell bent” on nominating a justice who would overturn Roe v. Wade.

She pledged to work to end the state’s abortion ban, and said she would pardon anyone convicted under the law, which is now not enforced due to Roe v. Wade. McCabe was alone among candidates on the stage who declined to say he would back whomever is the eventual nominee.

“It’s a mistake to make a party loyalty pledge,” McCabe said. “It sends the wrong message to voters. It says that you all think that party comes before everything.” Sen. Kathleen Vinehout, of Alma, stressed her rural roots and dairy farming background. She said she lives in an area where “internet comes at a slow walk” and people need guides for where to find a cell phone signal.

She also noted she has won three times in a district that voted for Walker three times and also backed Trump.

“I know what it’s like to run against a popular Republican incumbent and win,” Vinehout said.

State GOP Executive Director Mark Morgan knocked the Dem candidates, saying they would erase Walker’s reforms.

“Tonight, each of the Democrats running for governor offered nothing but promises to undo these reforms and undo the Wisconsin comeback – taking us back to the days of double digit unemployment, record job losses and massive tax increases. Hard-working Wisconsin families can’t afford the Democrats’ dangerous race to the left,” Morgan said.