

Democratic gubernatorial candidates at forum differ on funding public schools

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Democratic gubernatorial candidates took different approaches to funding public schools at a Madison forum ahead of Tuesday's primary.

Madison Mayor Paul Soglin told the Madison audience he'd want to reduce public education's reliance on the property tax for funding and shift it to either the income or sales tax, but made one thing clear.

"If you're going to spend more money on schools, you've got to spend more tax money, that's all there is to it," he said.

Another part of his school funding plan would be to overhaul the school funding formula.

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Other candidates, however, were less inclined to immediately resort to a tax hike to address public education funding.

State superintendent Tony Evers, who has been leading in all of the publicly released polls since spring, didn't rule out resorting to tax hikes.

"Yes, we need more money for our public schools, I would never disagree with that," he said.

But said he'd like to first consider eliminating tax incentives for the wealthy to find education funding rather than immediately resorting to tax hikes.

Attorney and former Dem Party Chair Matt Flynn has been outspoken in his call to repeal the Foxconn deal, and sees such a move as a way to free up funding for public schools. He also called for taking federal Medicaid dollars and high speed rail and eliminating the manufacturing and agriculture tax credit.

“That’s the money to invest in public education, not from raising taxes,” he said.

Former state Rep. Kelda Roys said she’d first target money “being wasted on corporate giveaways and tax credits for corporations that don’t need it.”

Attorney Josh Pade argued tax revenue from legalized marijuana markets would provide funding for public schools, while activist Mike McCabe blamed taxpayer subsidized private schools for siphoning resources away from the public school system.

Sen. Kathleen Vinehout pointed to four previous alternative budgets she authored which she argued prioritize public education with the same state budget dollars and a tweaked school funding formula.

State firefighters union head Mahlon Mitchell was not in attendance.

Differences in candidate opinion on other issues were rare, as has been exhibited during several past Democratic gubernatorial debates.

During a “lightning round” session at Wednesday night’s debate, where candidates simultaneously raised or kept lowered their hands to reflect their views on several policies, the candidates on several occasions voted as a block.

For instance, all candidates said they support legalizing recreational and medicinal marijuana, implementing background checks on all gun sales, and repealing so-called “Right to Work” legislation.

Nearly all candidates support implementing a \$15 minimum wage, with some slight differences from candidates on the timing of implementation.

But the candidates did provide several differing responses to a question that has perhaps never been asked before at a public candidate forum: which candidate would they vote for if they were not themselves on the ballot?

*Evers: Kathleen Vinehout

*Flynn: Paul Soglin

*McCabe: Kathleen Vinehout

*Pade: Kelda Roys

*Roys: Paul Soglin

*Soglin: Would write in himself.

*Vinehout: Tony Evers

State GOP spokesman Alec Zimmerman said the debate showed the Dems were “locked in a dangerous race to the left.

“From their wildly unsafe policy proposals like cutting the prison population in half, to their scandals that left children in danger in our schools and churches, it’s more apparent now than ever that all of these candidates are unfit to serve as governor,” Zimmerman said.