

In 1st SD GOP primary, Jacque emphasizes record, Renard touts outsider status

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Republican Alex Renard is looking to paint himself as a political outsider as he prepares to face off against four-term state Rep. André Jacque in the primary for the open 1st SD.

The 24-year-old operations manager for Renco Machine Co. in Green Bay, is also touting a series of “government reform” initiatives — as well as his business experience — that he’s looking to bring to Madison.

But Jacque, 37 and a full-time legislator, is holding up his “conservative track record” that includes spearheading changes to the state’s criminal justice system; supporting so-called “tort reform” and other regulatory overhauls; and backing a strict anti-abortion agenda.

“I have been that independent voice and I have been very effective in getting things done,” he said. “Some people would say it’s a liability to have positions staked out on so any issues. I look at it as a very big strength of mine just because people know where I stand.”

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Both candidates spoke to WisPolitics.com this week as part of a series of interviews with all special elections contenders. The primaries are May 15 with a general election June 12 to fill the 1st SD in northeastern Wisconsin and the 42nd AD, which is northeast of Madison.

Among the changes Renard says he wants to pursue should he be elected are: enforcing a policy to withhold pay from state lawmakers if the biennial budget isn’t

passed by the first day of the fiscal year and pushing for a Wisconsin constitutional amendment for across-the-board term limits in state offices of between 10-12 years, depending on the post.

Renard's campaign said he'd limit himself to three terms in the Senate even if the amendment doesn't come to fruition.

Renard and Jacque are largely on the same side of issues ranging from fetal tissue to the UW System tuition freeze.

But one topic that sets them apart is the "constitutional carry" bill that ultimately failed to pass the Legislature this session.

The bill, which would have allowed individuals to carry a concealed weapon without first obtaining a permit or going through any training, passed the Senate Judiciary and Public Safety Committee, but did not receive a floor vote in either chamber.

Renard, who has a concealed carry license, said he wouldn't support it.

"I do not have a problem with an individual having to obtain a permit or in that case going to a live fire exercise. It's what an individual like myself has went through and many others across the state, and it's what responsible gun owners will do in order to be able to exercise our Second Amendment right," he said.

But Jacque, who signed on as a co-sponsor of the bill, said he'd again support the bill if it comes back around.

"When you look at how we have open carry, which is really allowed more broadly, and all you have to do is put on a coat and suddenly it's concealed carry — that wouldn't be allowed without a permit," he said.

Citing the state's passage of concealed carry in 2011, Jacque said the "law has worked well" and he's looking to continue allowing for reciprocity with "as many other states in the country as possible."

But both candidates say they want to see bills involving the use of fetal tissue make their way through the Legislature.

Republicans this session again failed to find a compromise on legislation surrounding the sale of fetal tissue, as two competing bills circled the Legislature

but neither gained traction.

One, backed by the Health Without Harm Coalition, would have imposed a blanket prohibition on acquiring, providing or using a fetal body part from an abortion. The other would have banned the sale of fetal tissue, but allowed more avenues to continue research.

Jacque, who had worked for multiple sessions to get variations of his fetal tissue legislation passed, was a co-sponsor of the first bill. He said the issue was something he'd like to continue to lead on in the state Senate.

Renard, meanwhile, said he would support banning the sale of fetal tissue even if it means restricting research at UW-Madison, saying he's "100 percent pro-life."

On other issues:

*Continuing the UW System tuition freeze:

Both candidates signalled their support of the five-year UW tuition freeze, which lawmakers voted to continue in the most recent budget, although they were non-committal about whether it should be backfilled with general purpose revenue.

Jacque said he was "comfortable" with the current budget's extension of the tuition freeze, though he noted the question he comes back to is what the acceptable level of those expenses is.

And he said going forward, he'd like to "find ways to at least address the cost side of the college affordability question."

Renard said while he supports continuing the freeze, he'd want to work with the regents and other administrators to find further efficiencies within the UW System and "make (the freeze) viable for them."

*Road funding:

Asked if he'd support a 5 cent gas tax increase, Renard said he isn't "a big fan of taxes" but if it was offset elsewhere so the overall tax burden isn't increased, he said he "could live with that."

He also didn't give a position on raising vehicle registration fees or implementing

tolling, saying: “It’s always worth a discussion.”

Jacque, meanwhile, said he could see increasing vehicle registration fees or the gas tax as a possibility so long as it fits within parameters Gov. Scott Walker has laid out of any increase being offset by a reduction in taxes elsewhere.

He also said he is “willing to look at” tolling, but said there are other steps the Department of Transportation and the Legislature can also take to reduce overall expenditures on projects and find further efficiencies, such as design-build legislation, where an owner hires one entity to provide both design and construction work under a single contract.

Jacque said one of his priorities is also targeting funding toward local infrastructure projects, versus megaprojects, noting that as the state has increased transportation spending “we’ve been putting more of it toward the megaprojects.”

Listen to the Jacque interview:

https://soundcloud.com/wispolitics/160708_jacque/s-z5ACx

Listen to the Renard interview:

https://soundcloud.com/wispolitics/160709_renard/s-DWgzf