

Republicans Spiros, Jacobson differ on road funding, levy limits

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GOP state Rep. John Spiros sees the more than 8 percent increase in municipal road aids in this budget as a positive, saying local government officials have commended him for the boost.

Mosinee Mayor Brent Jacobson, his primary challenger, says it's a drop in the bucket that barely covers the cost of a sealing project in his community of 4,000.

At the heart of Jacobson's challenge of Spiros, R-Marshfield, is his contention the state Legislature has placed too many restrictions on local government, partly by failing to adequately fund road work and shared revenue, among other things.

Part of his answer to address that is a call to increase the gas tax by 5 cents a gallon and bring back indexing for inflation.

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Spiros, though, said any tax increase should be considered a last resort. Instead, he is calling for the state to look at transferring more money from the general fund to the transportation fund by pulling in dollars from purchases for automobiles.

"Whenever it comes down to raising taxes, things like that, that should always be a last resort," Spiros said. "We should look inside to determine what we need to do first."

Jacobson countered the transportation fund is approaching a tipping point in the balance between revenue and debt to cover road projects. He argued the state would be better off to use additional money in the general fund to pay for income tax cuts while pumping more money into the transportation fund through a gas tax

hike, which he noted amounts to 60 cents if you fill up with 12 gallons.

“I think his plan is a widely inefficient use of extra money if it’s even there,” Jacobson said.

Spiros, 57, was first elected to the Assembly in 2012 and was a Marshfield alderman from 2005-13. He won re-election in 2016 with 58 percent in the strongly Republican seat.

Jacobson, 34, has been the mayor of Mosinee since 2015 and is now in his second term.

Jacobson said he wouldn’t back legislation that would allow citizens to carry a concealed weapon without a permit and would support bringing back a mandatory waiting period for gun purchases.

Spiros, who said he has a concealed carry permit, said he would consider what some call constitutional carry. But he declined to say if he would support it, saying it’s not an issue he hears about when doing doors.

Jacobson, meanwhile, said he’d be open to building a new prison in Wisconsin to expand capacity, but would like to look at alternative sentencing programs, particularly for those with drug and alcohol problems. He’d also consider programs to release non-violent, elderly prisoners.

Spiros also would consider supporting a new prison, but only if it replaced an existing, inefficient facility. He, too, supports alternative sentencing programs.

One of their other disagreements is levy limits for local governments. Jacobson said he wants exemptions for things like road repair that he called “common-sense spending.” He’d also use some of the anticipated revenue from starting to collect taxes on some online sales to help boost shared revenue as well as cut taxes. But he’d want local governments to be required to reduce property taxes as a condition of accepting the additional money from the sales tax collections.

Spiros, though, said he’d considering using the revenue from online sales – expected to be \$120 million annually over a full fiscal year – to put more money into long-term transportation funding.

“I always look at government from the standpoint of how do we do it from a business standpoint, looking at efficiencies first and figuring out what you need to do from the bottom rather than going out and saying, ‘I need to raise taxes,” Spiros said.