

Walker, Evers trade shots on taxes, integrity in first debate

Posted on Saturday, Oct 20, 2018

Dem Tony Evers accused the gov Friday of failing to adequately fund education or transportation, calling the wheel taxes local governments have imposed and the school referendums local voters have approved “a Scott Walker tax.”

Walker, meanwhile, warned voters not to trust Evers on taxes, saying the state superintendent’s refusal to detail the range of a gas tax he’s considering means a massive one would come down the pipe after the election if his opponent wins.

During their first of their two debates, Walker also continued to charge Evers would consider hiking the state’s gas tax, now 30.9 cents a gallon, by \$1. The gov also warned his opponent would seek to increase income and property taxes as well.

“In the end, he’s not telling us what it is,” Walker said. “If you don’t have a plan until after the election, ladies and gentlemen, you have to be ready for a massive gas tax increase.”

>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)

Evers called the suggestion of a \$1 increase ridiculous.

“Holy mackerel,” Evers said. “A dollar a gallon is ridiculous. It’s never gonna happen.”

Evers also said he supports a 10 percent tax cut for those making up to \$100,000, a measure he argued would counter tax cuts for the wealthy under Walker’s tenure. He said his tax plan would treat the middle class fairly.

He added the Department of Public Instruction budget he proposed wouldn’t raise property taxes. Evers also noted 1 million Wisconsinites have voted to raise their

own property taxes.

“That is a Scott Walker tax. Those are tax increases,” Evers said. “We need to make sure that our system is fair and I believe that 10 percent for the middle class is fair and doable.”

Still, Walker argued he could aim for two-thirds state funding for public education while lowering property properties, as he said former Republican Gov. Tommy Thompson did. But Evers said he was skeptical given Walker hasn't met that mark despite eight years in office.

The debate, sponsored by the Wisconsin Broadcasters Association, included a panel of journalists who posted questions to the candidates. That includes questions on controversies that popped up this week: the DPI budget plagiarizing passages from four other works and four former Walker cabinet secretaries who have criticized his administration on several fronts, including what they said was a lack of openness and transparency.

Evers was dismissive of the plagiarism allegations, which the Walker campaign pointed out to the media, saying if that's the best the gov has on him, “he doesn't have much.”

Evers said DPI “dropped a few citations from the back pages” of budget provisions, the agency has talked to those involved and fixed it.

He also said Walker has no room to lecture him on plagiarism because he takes budget items directly from national organizations and passes them into law “with barely changing a word.” He stressed his DPI budget is seeking \$1.4 billion in additional state aid, and claimed Walker has taken credit for the successes from the education budgets he's proposed.

“That's what's important to me, not citations,” Evers said.

Walker countered he was “happy to copy Tommy Thompson,” who Walker mentioned several times during Friday's debate.

“I don't know of a teacher out there that would allow a student to hand in a term paper that plagiarized major portions, particularly from Wikipedia,” Walker said.

The former secretaries of Corrections, Financial Institutions, Transportation and the

Wisconsin Economic Development Corp. have criticized Walker on various fronts, including what three said was a lack of integrity.

The gov defended his administration's commitment to openness, noting the Wisconsin Freedom of Information Council gave him an award for its policies.

He also addressed the criticisms from the former secretaries as an outgrowth of his decision to have people with contrasting opinions around him.

Walker said that includes a former Transportation secretary who wanted to raise the gas tax, which he has pledged not to consider unless it is offset by reductions elsewhere.

"I'm not afraid to have people with diverse opinions out there. But I'll always be straight with the people of Wisconsin," Walker said.

Evers said it was troubling that those Walker hired and were his closest advisers were critical of the administration lacking integrity.

"You put your political agenda ahead of the people of Wisconsin," Evers said. "That is something that is frankly very frightening to me."

The two differed on a series of issues, including:

Health care: Evers pressed Walker on GOP AG Brad Schimel filing a lawsuit that could potentially strike down the Affordable Care Act.

The Dem argued the health of Wisconsinites could be put at risk if the law's protections for pre-existing conditions were abolished.

"Scott Walker says he wants to save pre existing conditions, but he's in federal court to get rid of the Affordable Care Act, which will get rid of those protections," Evers said.

Evers also tore into Walker for not taking federal dollars to expand the state's Medicaid program, and vowed to do so if elected.

"He left hundreds of millions of dollars on the table," Evers said.

Walker argued the Affordable Care Act "is no longer affordable" and touted his

health care reinsurance plan the Legislature passed. His administration projects the plan will lower premiums in 2019 for those who purchase their health care on the exchanges under Obamacare. Walker also slammed Evers for supporting the Affordable Care Act.

“We can protect people with pre-existing conditions in this state without protecting the failures of Obamacare,” Walker said.

Immigration: Evers said he’d support allowing undocumented immigrants to receive driver’s licenses, noting many work on Wisconsin dairy farms. He also would support legislation that would allow those brought to the U.S. illegally as children, often referred to as “dreamers,” to pay in-state tuition at public universities.

Currently 18 states allow undocumented immigrants to pay in-state rates.

Pressed on his position, Walker argued the federal government should look at changing its immigration laws.

“We’re a nation of immigrants and a nation of laws,” Walker said.

Marijuana: Evers said he’d be open to decriminalization of marijuana, adding he’s willing to look at the results of several referendums across the state where voters are weighing in on legalization.

Walker said he opposes both decriminalization and legalization, saying law enforcement officials and public health officials have argued marijuana is a gateway drug. He did, however, tout his administration’s approval of the use of CBD oil, which doesn’t contain marijuana’s psychoactive component, to treat certain medical conditions.