

Dem 64th AD candidates address tax cuts, pre-existing conditions, transpo funding

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Two of the Dems running for the recently vacated 64th Assembly District say they would have voted against the GOP version of a middle-class tax cut plan if they had been in the chamber last month.

But one Kenosha-area candidate, Gina Walkington, says she would have backed a different bill the Assembly took up during its first floor session period: legislation to guarantee the coverage of pre-existing conditions.

That bill, which has yet to be taken up by the Senate, received bipartisan support in January. But 19 Democrats — more than half the caucus — opted to vote against the effort, arguing it didn't go far enough.

The legislation included language GOP leaders said mirrors the Affordable Care Act's provisions banning annual and lifetime caps. But it didn't include language on essential health benefits, an addition Gov. Tony Evers and other Dems had been pushing for ahead of the floor vote.

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Walkington in a WisPolitics.com interview this week called the legislation "a critical first step that we need to take," though she lamented the lack of coverage for essential health benefits.

"I would have liked to have seen (the bill) go further," the 33-year-old community organizer from Bristol said, adding she would have likely supported the legislation on the floor but pushed for other additions going forward.

Meanwhile, fellow Dem Thaddeus “Tip” McGuire, an assistant DA for Milwaukee County who lives in Kenosha, expressed reservations about the bill.

In a separate interview, he pointed to a Milwaukee Journal Sentinel article that quoted insurance experts who argued the requirement under the bill wouldn’t work if the Affordable Care Act is struck down. That’s because, the report said, fewer healthy people would buy insurance, leading to higher premiums and more insurance companies leaving the market.

“I think I would have opposed this bill given the warnings experts had made at the time,” said McGuire, 31.

The pair accounts for two of the three candidates running in the Dem primary to take former Dem Rep. Peter Barca’s seat; the other is Spencer Zimmerman, a perennial candidate who lives in Janesville — well outside the Dem-dominated district.

Zimmerman did not respond to emails this week seeking to set up an interview. When reached by phone, he said he didn’t have time to discuss his candidacy but added he’s running because the Dem Party “has moved too far to the left.”

“The Democrats of today are talking about free Medicare, free tuition and (a) \$100 trillion Green New Deal, and we just can’t afford that,” he said. “So I want to bring back the kind of ideas that John F. Kennedy and Harry Truman had, so that’s why I’m running.”

On transportation Walkington and McGuire both said they weren’t fans of tolling, giving the 64th AD’s proximity to Illinois and the amount of cross-border traveling residents of the area do. Evers’ transportation plan in his budget doesn’t include tolling.

And they both generally expressed openness to Evers’ proposal to raise the gas tax by 8 cents a gallon.

McGuire said he supports “usage-based revenue” to fund roads, a category he noted a gas tax hike would fall into, though it’s not a “perfect” fit. But he said he isn’t “necessarily married” to the increase of 8-cents-per-gallon Evers is proposing.

The former Barca aide also said he’s “a little more skeptical” on the plan to eliminate the minimum markup on gasoline, which he said helps protect small

businesses and “locally owned gas stations from being pushed around by much larger gas stations.”

As for other possible transportation funding solutions, McGuire said he isn’t “particularly fond of” vehicle registration fee increases, because it’s a flat fee that doesn’t correlate with vehicle usage.

The gov is looking to increase registration fees for heavy trucks by 27 percent, as well as up vehicle title fees by \$10 for both original and transfer title charges. But he wouldn’t increase the vehicle registration fee, which is \$75.

Walkington, who ran unsuccessfully for the neighboring 61st AD last fall, called both the 8-cent gas tax increase and the nixing of the minimum markup on gasoline “a really good start.”

But she said she’s not sure if it’s the “full solution that we need to address the funding issues,” adding the state should also look at other options as well. That includes higher vehicle registration fees, a possibility she said “should be on the table.”

The winner of Tuesday’s primary will go on to face Republican Mark Stalker in the April 30 general election.

Hear the interview with McGuire:

<https://soundcloud.com/wispolitics/wispoliticscom-interview-with-tip-mcguire-64th-ad-dem-candidate/s-VvxxA>

Hear the Walkington interview:

<https://soundcloud.com/wispolitics/wispoliticscom-interview-with-gina-walkington-64th-ad-dem-candidate/s-sqeF7>