

Hintz, Thiesfeldt debate vaccine waiver bill on 'UpFront'

Posted on Monday, May 6, 2019

Assembly Minority Leader Gordon Hintz, D-Oshkosh, said his bill to repeal the personal conviction waiver on vaccines is about public health and safety.

But state Rep. Jeremy Thiesfeldt, R-Fond du Lac, said parental rights need to be protected.

The two appeared jointly Sunday on "UpFront," produced in partnership with WisPolitics.com.

Hintz said 90 percent of children who are getting a waiver from receiving the required vaccines before starting a daycare or school are using the personal exemption option. State law also allows parents to opt out their children for religious or health reasons.

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"Public health advocates, doctors and other groups have said the number one thing we can do to increase the vaccination rate and get people to protect themselves and others is getting rid of the personal waiver," Hintz said.

Thiesfeldt, chair of the Assembly Education Committee, said he, his wife and their four children are all vaccinated.

"I am not anti-vaccination. But I am pro-parental rights and responsibility," Thiesfeldt said. "We already have taken away too much responsibility from parents. There are few things more sacred than being able to control your own health care, and I think this is just a step too far."

Hintz argued people should be vaccinated not just for themselves, but for others.

That includes babies or people with compromised immune systems who can't get vaccinated.

But Thiesfeldt said as a parent, his "responsibility is for my own children." He said parents with concerns about having their children vaccinated have met with him and "are very well studied on this stuff."

"I suspect some families know more than the doctors do," he said.

Hintz said it was important for his bill to get a public hearing to raise public awareness about the issue and help people understand how serious the issue is.

The debate over vaccinations comes as health officials are grappling with a resurgent measles situation. But Wisconsin hasn't seen a case of the virus since 2014.

Department of Health Services spokeswoman Jennifer Miller credits the "vigilance" of parents in the state getting their children vaccinated on time.

A new Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report finds 704 people have been hit with the measles so far this year, marking the largest number of cases in 25 years. This comes nearly two decades after measles was declared eliminated in the United States.

The CDC report shows more than 500 of the people infected in 22 states were unvaccinated, and more than one-third of the cases were in young children.

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