

Johnson, Donovan clash on CRT in Milwaukee mayoral debate

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Meeting in a Milwaukee mayoral forum, former Ald. Bob Donovan and Acting Mayor Cavalier Johnson sparred over whether critical race theory should be taught in schools.

Johnson said it's important to teach critical race theory lessons in schools. But he doesn't believe it's right to make kids who are possible descendants of slave owners feel guilty just for their what their families may have done in the past. He also said the mayor does not play a direct role in K-12 education, "but I think in a city like Milwaukee that's majority minority, it's important."

"It's critically important that those things be taught in the United States," said Johnson, who would be Milwaukee's first elected Black mayor. "We are patriots, we love our country, but we have a scar, an original sin, a damaging effect that has lasted for generations and generations and centuries in this country."

Donovan's argument that "CRT, I don't think, has any place in our schools," was met with a handful of boos from the crowd. The former southwest side alderman also said he wants to empower parents and give them more school choice access.

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"Now that doesn't mean I don't want our kids to learn history, warts and all," he said. "I believe most parents, and I want to empower parents, I am a supporter of school choice."

The two candidates preparing for the April 5 election largely agreed on the need to address increasing juvenile detention rates and fund community policing efforts to help reduce crime and violence.

At the “Tussle at Turner” event, co-organized by WisPolitics.com, the two recounted they worked together to get the votes in the Milwaukee Common Council needed to accept a \$10 million federal grant to address violent crime last year. The Community Oriented Policing Services grants passed in January last year after failing to clear the council the previous year.

Johnson, who is also president of Common Council, initially took credit for “going behind the scenes with counselors” to get it passed.

“And that was a direct result of my advocacy and my work as president of the Common Council, when I was there before coming to the mayor’s office,” he said.

Donovan, who served on the council for 20 years, followed his opponent by saying he forgot to mention their cooperation to get those votes.

“I think if my opponent was honest he would tell you this: he called me for help on getting that grant through,” he said. “And I did help, and we got it through, but it wasn’t you alone.”

Johnson responded that he appreciated Donovan acknowledging their work and his support to get the measure past the council.

They also agreed on supporting a Common Council push to create a juvenile reception center. That concept, used in Portland, Ore., is meant to offer constructive programming to kids who commit misdemeanors and reduce the number of repeat offenders.

Donovan said he believes the model is working well in Portland, and Milwaukee could enjoy that same success.

“Another example of something that’s working in one community that we can adopt and initiate here in Milwaukee,” he said.

Johnson added the move is important for Milwaukee youth because it would give them more options closer to home.

“If a young person does go awry, they ought to not only be held to account, but also have the opportunity to be straightened out as well,” he said.

Watch the debate [here](#).