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On the issues: Wirch and Steitz
8/8/2011

By Kay Nolan
For WisPolitics.com

WisPolitics asked candidates Bob Wirch and Jonathan Steitz their views on current issues. Below is a summary of their responses.

-- Areas of disagreement with your own party and how you'd work across the aisle:

Steitz: I am not a rubber stamp for Walker; I'm not going to be a rubber stamp for anybody. I'm not happy with how he handled the micro-brewery issue. I wasn't in favor of cutting SeniorCare. I want to be the type of person who can work with people on both sides of the aisle.

Wirch: I championed an issue for an independent DNR secretary who would be named by the Natural Resources Board. I went against Gov. Jim Doyle and a number of other Democrats on that. I still believe I was right. That's the system that was in place for many decades before being changed by Gov. Tommy Thompson.

-- Possible changes to recall process:

Steitz: I'd certainly be open to raising the bar as far as the percentage (of signatures) that's required. I'm not real interested in having legislation that says there has to be a reason for a recall, because that's going to lead to having courts decide on what is and what isn't a valid reason for recall.

Wirch: I think there's pros and cons. Clearly, accountability is a good thing for the people of Wisconsin; on the other hand, it's a waste of taxpayer money at a time when budgets are tight.

-- Supreme Court election process:

Steitz: Voters should have a say in who sits on Supreme Court, yet elections tend to politicize it too much. I'd be open to having justices appointed by the governor, but having a process whereby voters could remove problem justices.

Wirch: I'm considering supporting a bill that would ask voters to decide whether to continue having elections or establish a merit selection process whereby a pool of justice candidates would be compiled by law school deans or other professionals and presented to the governor for appointment.

-- How to replenish unemployment trust fund:

Steitz: Not sure how to do that, but I think the unemployment compensation system invites abuse and creates a disincentive for people to find work.

Wirch: We have a long history of keeping those decisions away from politicians. The decision-makers now are half-union and half-management, and that's how it should be. You have to look at the long-term system and not short-term political gain, so I would rely on composition of the UC council to address that problem.

-- Raising the sales tax rate to boost school funding:

Steitz: I would not be in favor of increasing the sales tax rate for any reason unless we completely disbanded income taxes.

Wirch: Not at this time. Perhaps in the future. Sales taxes are a regressive tax. Other taxes, such as property taxes, you can traditionally write off. It's very difficult to get any kind of write-off for sales taxes.

-- Autonomy for UW-Madison:

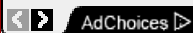
Steitz: It's not an issue that I feel is a key issue in this campaign, so it's not something I've spent time on.

Wirch: That was a trial balloon that I'm glad was shot down. I think there should be more autonomy for all UW campuses, but not just for Madison.

-- Views on collective bargaining changes:

Steitz: In Kenosha, in my district, we're having to lay off teachers, because the union won't reopen their contract, which was passed before the changes took effect. But in other districts, the collective bargaining changes are working. I have no problem with collective

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bargaining for private sector unions, however.

Wirch: The system of collective bargaining is something that worked well for 50 years, and we should go back to it. There should probably be some small changes, but public employees -- for example, prison guards -- definitely should be able to bargain on issues of workplace safety.

-- The proposed and now shelved Kenosha-Racine-Milwaukee commuter rail:

Steitz: I think it could be a real boon to the economy in the Kenosha area, just as the metra rail going to Chicago has been a real good thing for Kenosha. But it needs to be sustainable on its own; the KRM taxing authority had no accountability to taxpayers. The timing isn't right in the middle of the recession, but when the time is right, I would be very open to it.

Wirch: The only way I'd recommend it is if there were a voter referendum on the issue.

-- High speed rail between Milwaukee and Madison:

Steitz: I would not be in favor. It needs to be sustainable and that wasn't going to happen, ever.

Wirch: I think that's sad because that was money coming into our state. It would have created jobs, but in fact, it (Gov. Scott Walker's decision to turn down the funding) has lost us jobs.



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