

Candidates draw lines in the sand

Tittl, Kossik spar about road spending, abortion in race for 25th District

By Todd S. Bergmann

The candidates for this area's state Assembly seat don't agree on much, and it showed during a forum last week in Manitowoc.

Democrat Ronald Kossik is challenging Rep. Paul Tittl, the Republican incumbent, for the 25th District seat. Both men are from Manitowoc. They squared



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off on issues from transportation funding to abortion at a League of Women Voter's forum at Manitowoc City Hall on Oct. 27.

Tittl is a former Manitowoc alderman and former Manitowoc County board chair and owns Vacuum & Sewing Center in downtown Manitowoc.

Kossik is co-chairman of the Manitowoc County Democratic Party, a former Manitowoc School Board member and president, formerly owned a software company and now is a maintenance process improvement consultant.

Highway spending was a key issue at the forum.

Tittl said he supports an audit of the state Department of Transportation "to make sure that money is being spent correctly."

He said the Legislature recently banned the DOT from placing art and decorations along highways, in part to spare local governments the cost of upkeep.

Kossik suggested a return to indexing gasoline taxes, as Wisconsin did until 2005, when the state took a politically popular route and ended the practice.

"It is easier to get yourself into a hole than to get yourself out of a hole," he said.

Although he did not call for indexing gas taxes, Tittl supported a new tax on hybrid and electric vehicles.

Both candidates said non-citizens should be allowed to drive in Wisconsin if they pass the same test as everyone else and drive insured vehicles.

While Kossik called for issuing driver's licenses, Tittl suggested driver's cards instead.

Immigrants are currently driving without licenses and insurance, and Kossik said "if they get into an accident they are likely to flee.

"If we encourage them to be responsible, that is to our advantage," he said.

Tittl said drivers who follow the law pay for those who drive without licenses or insurance.

"We pay for it in higher uninsured motorist insurance premiums," he said.

On education, the candidates disagreed on the impact of Gov. Scott Walker's tuition freeze and budgetary restrictions on the University of Wisconsin system.

Kossik said that Walker has conducted an almost complete assault of the university system and caused a loss of valuable talent.

Tittl argued that the tuition freeze will reduce student loan debt for graduates.

"They are still getting a great education," he said.

The two also discussed the voucher program, which allows low-income families to send children to private schools at state expense.

Kossik said the vouchers disrupt funding of public schools and that private schools need to be as accountable as public schools.

Although he supports the program for low-income families, Tittl said he opposes expansion so the state can keep money flowing to public schools.

Tittl said he advanced an amendment to the state budget to restore funding for public schools.

Kossik said he would restore funding for education from preschool to graduate school.

The candidates also differed sharply on abortion. Kossik said he supports the right to abortion and Tittl opposes it.

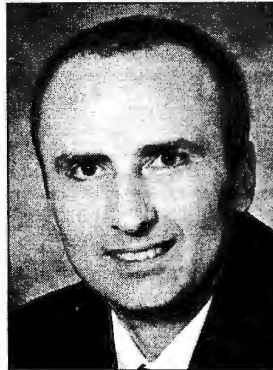
Kossik said the U.S. Supreme Court has delineated standards for fetuses during the first, second and third trimesters of pregnancy.

"It is a practical solution," he said.

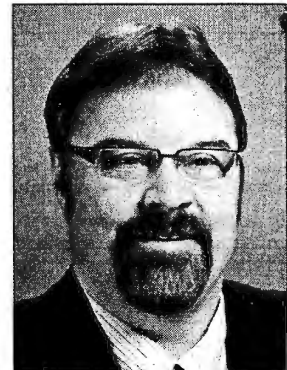
However, Tittl said the nation should move away from talk about fetuses.

"It's a baby," he said. "It's a live human being. They call it women's health. But, it's about the child's health."

On the issue of allowing the use of medical marijuana in Wisconsin, Kossik said he would support decriminalizing all marijuana, not just medical marijuana.



Ron Kossik



Paul Tittl

Tittl said he asked for an Assembly hearing on the issue so he could learn more facts, but the Assembly leadership denied his request.

"I found that the leadership controls more than I want," he said.

Both candidates said that the state needs to take action about the growing drug problem in the state.

Tittl, chairman of the Assembly Mental Health Reform Committee, said the cost of putting a patient in a state mental health hospital is more than \$1,000 a day.

He said he supports helping people with addictions to opiates and similar drugs.

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"Anything to get the help that they need, I am for it," Tittl said.

As a former police officer, Kossik said that the criminal justice system is the wrong way to treat drug and mental health problems, calling for more resources at the community level.

On guns, Kossik said he favors a ban on assault weapons, sensible precautions to prevent gun deaths of children and closing loopholes that allow sales of guns at gun shows and over the Internet without background checks.

Tittl said he supports allowing people to own assault weapons and opposes closing the gun show exception.

"The guns on the streets are not being sold at gun

shows," he said.

On campaign financing, Kossik said he supports limits on large contributions.

"There is corruption of our political system by big money and dark money," he said. "We need a political process that serves all of the people."

However, Tittl said he is concerned that limits on contributions would restrict free speech.

"There is a fine line between free speech and stifling of free speech," he said.

In economic matters, Kossik called for state policies that raise wages and give more power to labor unions.

Under Walker, the state Legislature passed a right-to-work law and Act 10, which diminished public employee union power while allowing individuals the right to decide if they will join a union.

Tittl indicated he likes the existing situation.

"Wisconsin has a strong work ethic," he said. "People want to work to provide for themselves and their families."