



Walker, Burke debate jobs, Milwaukee issues

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MILWAUKEE -- Dem Mary Burke Friday slammed Gov. Scott Walker for what she said was a lagging economy, knocking his claim the state does not have a jobs problem.

In their second and final debate, Walker countered by seeking to tie Burke to his predecessor, Jim Doyle. Walker said several times through the course of the hour-long exchange that his Dem rival had previously said she completely supported Doyle's policies, which he said led to a fiscal mess in Wisconsin that he cleaned up after taking office.

Walker accused her of saying one thing and doing another, saying it's something people hate about politics.

"Now that she's running and Governor Doyle's not so popular, she's changed," Walker said.

Walker also knocked Burke for her time as Commerce secretary, saying it was the only time in the past two decades the state's unemployment rate was above the national average.

Burke fired back Walker was cherry picking numbers, noting the unemployment rate when she was Commerce secretary was 4.8 percent -- it was 5.5 percent in September -- and the state had 50,000 more jobs.

"In the number of times Governor Walker has mentioned Jim Doyle it should be clear that he'd rather be running against him instead of me. But the hair alone should tell you we're two different people," Burke said, making a crack about Doyle's baldness.

[Watch archived video of the debate](#)

The debate was sponsored by the Wisconsin Broadcasters Association and featured a panel of Milwaukee media. That led to a series of questions related to the state's largest city, including how to improve its economy, whether the candidates supported public financing for a new Milwaukee Bucks arena and if they would approve a proposed off-reservation in Kenosha.

Burke opened the debate by taking Walker to task for his comment in their first meeting a week ago that Wisconsin didn't have a jobs problem, but a work

problem. Burke said the typical family has seen a drop of nearly \$3,000 in their income over the last four years.

“That’s a jobs problem,” she said. “People are working harder and harder, but they’re seeing less for it.”

Walker opened by touting new figures out this week that showed 8,400 private sector jobs were created in the past month, which he said was the best September the state has seen in more than a decade. He also touted the unemployment rate’s drop to the lowest it’s been since 2008.

At one point, Walker raised questions about the authenticity of Burke's jobs plan, which lifted passages from proposals put forward by Dem gubernatorial candidates in other states. Burke's campaign blamed the copied text on a consultant who had used the language in work he did for the other campaigns.

Walker said at one point Burke's plan included ideas he's already put into action. He also said he's all for taking good ideas, but crediting those who came up with them.

"That's the difference out there with leadership," he said.

Burke shot back: “To try and question my integrity is just trying to distract from that failure on jobs.”

Burke and Walker also disagreed on whether to strengthen penalties for first-time drunken driving offenses, a topic that did not come up during their first meeting.

Burke argued a first-time offense should be a misdemeanor rather than a citation as it currently is under Wisconsin law. She said there are not enough consequences now for a first offense and she would support increased education and substance abuse treatment programs to combat the problem.

"We haven’t moved the needle enough," she said. "This is costing us a lot of money, a lot of personal injury."

But Walker said traffic accidents have gone down, and that “criminalizing first time offenders isn’t the answer.”

“We need to crack down on repeat offenders,” he said.

Burke knocked Walker’s handling of a proposed off-reservation casino in Kenosha, accusing him of flip-flopping on the criteria he originally established to decide whether to approve the project. She also criticized him for not including job creation and economic development on the list of considerations

before making a decision, which she said he has dragged out for 14 months.

“I will not kick the can down the road as Governor Walker has done,” she said.

Walker sought to tie the issue back to Doyle, saying the former governor signed compacts with the tribal governments that would allow one to hold out on some \$100 million in payments due to the state if a casino in Kenosha was approved. The Forest County Potawatomi, which has a casino in Milwaukee and opposes the Kenosha proposal, notified the state over the summer it was withholding a gaming payment because the state had not yet rejected the project.

Walker also defended his handling of the issue, saying the federal government took nine years before signing off.

“We’re going to take the time necessary to make sure we don’t put a \$100 million hole in the budget,” Walker said.

The two also differed in their approaches to a new arena for the NBA’s Milwaukee Bucks. The team changed ownership earlier this year after former U.S. Sen. Herb Kohl sold the team. Since then, there has been an ongoing discussion of whether the team will receive some public assistance for a new facility, and it has been suggested the team will move if one is not built.

Walker said he does not support a sales tax or other new tax for the project as some have suggested. He said the state should look at the actual value of the team -- which he characterized as the revenue the state would lose without the Bucks -- and use that as the foundation for any discussion of how to fund an arena. He said he didn't want to see the team leave the state.

Burke cited her experience as an executive with Trek Bicycle, her family’s business, in her belief that an investment has to sometimes be made to reap rewards. She said a thriving Milwaukee economy was important to the state as a whole.

“The public option should be on the table, but it should be the last one,” she said.

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For WisPolitics.com*