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Final recall debate gets international attention

MILWAUKEE -- Thursday's debate between Gov. Scott Walker and Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett drew news media not only from Wisconsin but also the national and international press.

Among media outlets that sent reporters and photographers to cover the event at Marquette University Law School in downtown Milwaukee were the PBS Newshour, Huffington Post, Chicago Tribune, Christian Science Monitor, Boston Globe, NHK Japan Broadcast Radio -- which was broadcasting live in Japan, The Irish Times, The Sunday Times, NPR News, Reuters, and CBS Evening News.

Afterward, debate moderator Mike Gousha told WisPolitics.com that Thursday's debate was much like a Barrett/Walker debate he'd hosted during the 2010 gubernatorial election.

"I think it was somewhat similar in the respect that they had a few sharp exchanges, they had a few moments where they forcefully disagreed, but for the most part, I thought it was a very civil discussion," said Gousha. "People talk about our polarized times, but I don't think the tone or tenor was all that different from other years."

Gousha said he also did not see a substantial change from 2010 in either candidate's demeanor.

"I think they're pretty much who they are. They're comfortable in their own skin. They're going to represent themselves in a way that they're comfortable. They're not going to do something that's so off the wall that that's not who they really are."

Afterward, each quickly took off in separate directions to shake hands with members of the audience. Both kissed their wives, who were in the audience. But Barrett and Walker maintained their distance from each other.

Each candidate met separately with reporters afterward, and each claimed victory.

"The mayor didn't answer the questions, he doesn't have a plan," said Walker.

"Governor Walker failed to answer about the John Doe investigation and failed to release the emails and refused to say who is paying for his criminal defense fund," said Barrett.

The second and final gubernatorial recall debate was produced by WISN-TV and broadcast over the statewide "UpFront with Mike Gousha" network in cooperation with WisPolitics.com and the Marquette University Law School.

The first question went to the governor; he also got to give the closing statement thanks to flip of a coin. Both wore nearly identical outfits: charcoal colored suits, light blue shirts, red neckties and American flag pins on their lapels. Walker wore the yellow-and-black wrist band that has been spotted lately on his left wrist.

Barrett showed up first, and as he waited, he quipped to the audience gathered that he would deliver a college lecture. Walker nodded attentively as rules of the debate were explained. The two chatted pleasantly with each other and with Gousha for about 20 minutes before the debate began.

-- By Kay Nolan

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