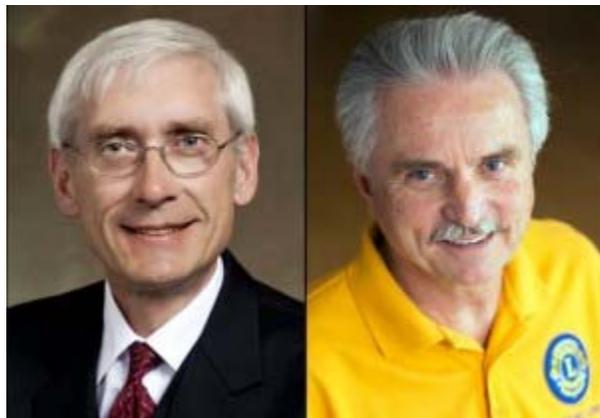


The voters are right: Vouchers are wrong



6 HOURS AGO • [CAP TIMES EDITORIAL](#)

Wisconsin held a referendum on school vouchers this spring. The results were clear and unequivocal.

On April 2, voters sent a clear message that they oppose vouchers when they re-elected Tony Evers as state superintendent of public instruction by a wide margin. Traveling across the state during the campaign, Evers did not mince his words, telling voters that private school vouchers posed a threat to public education. And they agreed.

Now the question is whether legislators will respect the will of the people.

We'll get a measure of the legislative response this week, when the powerful Joint Finance Committee votes on whether to embrace Gov. Scott Walker's plan to expand Wisconsin's private school voucher program.

Some Republican senators have objected to the proposal as the governor has presented it. That means that, even with the Legislature dominated by Walker's party, his agenda could take a hit.

And it should.

After Walker announced his proposal, the loudest objections to the plan — and to the broader national push to shift taxpayer dollars away from public education and toward private experiments — came from Evers. An educator who in 2009 was elected to lead the Department of Public Instruction, Evers appeared before the Legislature's Joint Finance Committee and in communities across Wisconsin to state that opposition. "This has to stop," he said. "The state cannot continue to play favorites. We can and must meet our constitutional obligation to invest in all of our kids."

Complaining that the previous Walker budget had cut \$1.8 billion from public schools, Evers argued it was wrong for the governor to use his 2013-15 budget to essentially freeze public school funding while hiking spending for private voucher schools.

Staking out so clear a position in opposition to the governor's agenda was risky. Evers was up for re-election and faced a determined challenge from Republican state Rep. Don Pridemore, a steady supporter of Walker's legislative agenda. The governor did not endorse in the nonpartisan race and that miffed Pridemore. But the challenger's campaign was cheered on by the Republican Assembly speaker and conservative radio hosts.

Evers could easily have responded by mounting a cautious re-election run. Instead, he campaigned prior to the April 2 election with a message that Walker's voucher scheme posed a

threat to public education.

“This money isn’t coming from Madison. This money is coming directly from your school districts,” Evers told teachers and parents. “It doesn’t take a rocket scientist to see what the priority is here. It’s not public schools. It’s voucher schools. It’s privatization, and don’t let anybody tell you differently.”

With a challenger campaigning as a proponent of vouchers — and charging that Evers was too closely aligned with educators and their unions — the race offered Wisconsin voters what the Associated Press referred to as a “stark choice.”

Voters responded by giving Evers a 61-39 percent victory statewide.

“Today’s election offered voters a crystal clear choice between two very different philosophies about education,” the superintendent declared on election night. “Voters spoke loudly and clearly, affirming their commitment to Wisconsin’s strong public schools and calling for a much-needed reinvestment to support the over 870,000 public school kids in our state.”

The governor may not waver. His positions are popular with conservatives at the national level, and it is no secret that he’s pondering a 2016 presidential run. But Republican legislators, especially in the state Senate, have raised appropriate concerns. Indeed, Senate President Mike Ellis says that a number of Republicans find the governor’s proposal “unacceptable.” Ellis has said that Walker’s proposal will be “drastically changed” during the budget debate.

Now we’re at the drastic change moment. Republican legislators who were disinclined to go along with Walker on vouchers — and his misguided approach to the broader education funding debate — have a chance to say “no” to the governor’s agenda.

And they have a reference point that should count for more than partisan ties.

In a “stark choice” election, voters gave overwhelming support to the candidate who was outspoken in defense of public education. The voters are right: Vouchers are wrong.

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