

OPB News



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Saxton And Kulongoski Square Off On Children's Issues

By Kristian Foden-Vencil

PORTLAND, OR (2006-09-28) Gubernatorial hopefuls Democratic Governor Ted Kulongoski and Republican challenger Ron Saxton held their first debate of the 2006 general election Thursday.

It was held at OPB's Portland studios on the theme of "children and families."

Kristian Foden-Vencil listened to the hour-long discussion and files these highlights.

OPB sponsored the debate with Children First for Oregon, The Children's Institute and Stand for Children. Governor Kulongoski won a coin toss, so was first with his opening statement.

Ted Kulongoski: "Oregon families over the last four years have had a very difficult time because of the last recession. There was high unemployment, hunger actually increased for children. The general fund lost 25%. But because of that time, I made a commitment that I was going to recover Oregon's economy and that the available resources would be put into play. And children would come to the head of the line. We've added 30,000 children to the Oregon health plan, we've added more resources to preschool and at the same time we've reduced hunger and there's Jessica's law."

Ron Saxton was given the same 90 seconds.

Ron Saxton: "The elections about, are we getting the leadership we need or can we do better. Is it time for a change? I think it's time for a change. And when we look at some of the things out there. The report he mentioned by the sponsor, Children First. They gave Oregon a B- when he came into office. We're now a D+ That's not something to be proud of. And when you look at some of the other things around the state. The FBI put out some reports. Ranked us 49th in the country for law enforcement capital. Right at the top in terms of crimes,. The National Policy Research institute, ranked us 42. Forbes Magazine ranked us 31st when we came to a place to do business. None of these things are to be proud of. And none of them allow us what to do for children, what we need to do for this state until we've got it on track."

OPB moderator Christy George asked the candidates a series of questions about education -- for example, would they hold education spending harmless if state revenues decline over the next four years?

Kulongoski said he would fully fund K-through 12 through Community College and Higher Education. Saxton said education is important but the state needs to look at how it spends its money.

The candidates also answered questions on whether they support pre-kindergarten education for all Oregon kids. Kulongoski said he has started looking into preschool for all three and four year olds. Saxton said it's a wonderful goal but, again questioned whether the state has the money.

Indeed, that theme sparked the feistiest part of the debate, where George asked the candidates about their stance on universal healthcare for kids and how it might be financed.

Ron Saxton: "You have to live with reality. The governor has proposed raising taxes over and over. And he

has not been successful in getting those tax increase through. Anyone who thinks the solution to solving problems, whether it's more healthcare or better education, is just dreaming. We've got to have leadership here that talks about how to take the resources that are available and how to demonstrate to the taxpayers that we're spending the money well. And then if we need to have a discussion about more resources we can have that. But that's not where voters are. The voters are in no mood to raise taxes because they don't believe the money is being well spent..."

Ted Kulongoski: "I'm always interested to listen to Ron. This is the person who wants to cut the capital gains cut. He's opposed to actually trying to provide more revenue sources for the middle income tax payers. I want to actually make the tax system, more fair., He opposes putting the corporate kicker into a rainy day fund, he wants to eliminate the estate tax. You know ultimately you get someone who represents your interests and my interest has been representing working families, children, seniors. The difference is Ron has a corporate side to him, He likes big oil companies, and big car companies and big drug companies. He likes the privileged few."

Saxton said he'd like Kulongoski to come up with evidence of such a bias, but the debate moved on.

Saxton expressed his support of Measure 43 -- which would require doctors to notify a minor's parents before performing an abortion, except in the case of a medical emergency or with the state's permission. Kulongoski said he opposes the measure and emphasized his support for sex education and access to contraception.

Saxton and Kulongoski also split on the issue of the children of illegal immigrants who end up in the Emergency Room -- should the state cover their healthcare?

Ron Saxton: "You know I don't think children are the issue when we're talking about immigration. The law is children are entitled to an education. Removing children from services isn't the point here. The point in immigration is that we have an adult immigration program and we've got to take it on and deal with it and congress needs to set rules that are enforceable and can be lived with. I'm not out to pick any fight with the kids. I'm out to deal with the adult problem."

Christy George: "Governor, your response?"

Ron Saxton: "You know, I don't understand that answer at all because it is about kids. Because if you think that I as the governor of this state am going to allow a child who needs healthcare, for our state to turn its back on him, the answer is No. I will not turn my back on children, If they need healthcare if they need assistance, this state is going to help them."

Three other debates are scheduled. The two major party candidates will appear at the Portland City Club on October 13th, on KGW TV on October 17th and in Medford on KOBI, October 24th.

All the debates excluded the three minor-party candidates
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