

Gubernatorial candidates Kevin Stitt and Drew Edmondson seem to agree on quite a few things they think Oklahoma needs to do. What they don't agree on is how to pay for them. Democrat Edmondson and Republican Stitt both told the Rotary Club of Tulsa on Wednesday that education needs more money, fewer Oklahomans should be in jail, and the state is last or nearly last in too many categories it shouldn't be. They agreed that mental health is a problem and that medical marijuana is OK but recreational is not. But when it came time to explain how Oklahomans would pay for smaller class sizes, addiction treatment programs, better roads and bridges, access to health care, and other odds and ends like public safety and economic development, Edmondson and Stitt offered different answers. Stitt said rising revenue, brought about in part by new tax measures enacted over the past two years, and better management will be enough. Edmondson said something to the effect that Oklahomans had heard that before, and pointed to the Step Up proposal brought forward earlier this year by Oklahoma City business interests. It called for more than \$700 million in new revenue, about \$400 million more than was finally approved by the Legislature. "There's \$1 billion in more revenue coming in this year than last year," Stitt said. "They just increased taxes \$400 million in the last session. So, no, we don't need more revenue. We have to reform the way state government is run." "I hope we have \$1 billion (in new revenue) next year," Edmondson said. "I don't think we will. The latest forecast we had said maybe \$800 million. The September numbers were down a little bit. And \$400 million of that, Mr. Stitt would have vetoed."

Stitt said last spring that he would have vetoed the legislation authorizing increases in fuel, gross production and cigarette taxes, which lawmakers said were necessary to pay for increases in teacher pay. He has since backed off somewhat from the position, saying he would not seek to repeal the taxes. Stitt wants more control than previous governors over individual agencies and said he would appoint a "chief operating officer" to

ride herd on agency directors, who he said are “just spinning everybody in circles.”

“That’s the only way we’re going to deliver better services,” Stitt said. Edmondson agreed

that efficiencies can be found in state government, saying it would “take about six

hours” to name them all, but in the end he doesn’t believe they’ll add

up to enough to do what needs to be done. He proposes another hike

in the gross production tax, lifting a long-term capital gains tax exemption claimed by

relatively few Oklahomans, and an additional 50-cent per pack tax on cigarettes. In the

past, Edmondson has said he favors a cigarette tax mainly as a deterrent to

smoking. Edmondson scoffed at Stitt’s suggestion that Oklahoma become more “business friendly,” saying

state has already adopted such business-friendly measures as right to work, tort reform and

workers compensation reform. “We did all of those things, but we get the same

answer from corporate executives: “When you start investing in your people, we’ll start investing

in Oklahoma.” “I want to create the kind of transparency we’re all used to,”

Stitt said. “Until we get there, it doesn’t matter how much money we throw

at the system; they could never spend enough.” Farm groups endorsement: Later Wednesday, Stitt

appeared at the Tulsa State Fair with representatives of the Oklahoma Pork Council, the

Oklahoma Cattlemen’s Association and the political arm of the Oklahoma Farm Bureau “mostly

for an endorsement of Stitt, but also to attack Edmondson. Stitt, who owns two

parcels of farm land in the Tulsa area and runs a few cattle, promised

to “protect our farmers and ranchers from out-of-state animal groups” and to preserve the

agriculture sales tax exemption. Ag organizations may like Stitt, but they really despise Edmondson.

The animosity goes back more than a decade to his time as Oklahoma attorney

general, when he ran up against several of them in disputes over water pollution

and confined feeding operations. The quarrel has only intensified with time. “What we know

about Drew Edmondson is that he is not a supporter of expanding agriculture,” said

Oklahoma Pork Council Executive Director Roy Lee Lindsey at Wednesday’s event. Randy Krehbiel 918-581-83

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