

Some voters keeping open mind in governor's race after first forum

By Andy Metzger STATE HOUSE NEWS SERVICE | Posted: Thursday, September 25, 2014 3:00 am

BOSTON — With less than six weeks until election day, about 10 to 20 percent of the electorate is undecided in the competitive governor's race and a forum yesterday did little to sway the opinion of some of the attendees.

Democrat Martha Coakley has led in some polls, while another showed her statistically tied with Republican Charlie Baker. The three independents, Scott Lively, Evan Falchuk and Jeff McCormick, have yet to gain traction in surveys with voters, and Coakley and Baker have yet to close the deal in some cases.

Four of the candidates attended a Providers' Council forum in Boston's Faneuil Hall yesterday, where they spoke broadly about the need to support human services workers. Lively, an anti-gay Springfield preacher, was not invited.

"I want some more passion out of both of them. Tell me why you're doing it," said Jack Kelly, a consultant and former City Council candidate from Boston. Kelly told the News Service he is a Democrat and will "most likely" back Coakley.

Laura Nichols, a Boston resident who works for the Department of Children and Families, said she voted for Steven Grossman in the Democratic primary, and is now "undecided" about who to support in the general election.

"I have some difficulty with the way Coakley presents herself as a candidate," Nichols told the News Service, saying she is "leaning toward Baker."

Nichols, who said Coakley has been a good attorney general and knows people who know Baker personally, said her opinion shifts away from Baker on issues, such as the U.S. Supreme Court's Hobby Lobby decision.

"That is an issue that I would lean toward Coakley on," Nichols said. Baker initially dismissed the import of the ruling, which allows certain businesses to deny reproductive

health care coverage on a religious basis — while Coakley blasted it as a decision that “undercuts vital efforts to ensure equality both here in Massachusetts and across the country.”

A recent MassINC poll found Coakley with a 46-36 lead over Republican Charlie Baker, with 12 percent undecided. A Rasmussen Reports poll found Coakley and Baker tied at 42 percent each, with 10 percent undecided. A SocialSphere poll found Coakley edging Baker 39 to 36 with 19 percent undecided. The independents have yet to gain much traction.

Roxana Gomez, the Latino Elder Program coordinator in the Worcester area for Centro Las Americas, left the forum without hearing much difference between the candidates and without making up her mind.

“All of them agree,” said Gomez, a Dudley resident. She said, “The four of them all say, ‘yes, yes.’”

Gomez, who voted in the Republican primary, but declined to say who she supported between Baker and Mark Fisher, noted the low salaries of human services workers, and said she would “support a candidate who would help us.”

Asked about the recent criticism Baker has received from Democrats about women’s issues, Gomez said, “Women, most of the time we are going to be on the woman’s side.”

Falchuk, who was vocal in his critique of Coakley’s handling of health care issues and is attempting to garner enough support to create a United Independent Party, picked up at least one supporter at the forum.

“He’s really the only candidate that gets it out of the four, and I think you really need to give a third party a chance,” said John Davies, of Haverhill. A full-time musician involved in the Haverhill Clubhouse, Davies said Falchuk would be a relief from the “hackerama” and “partisan politics.”

Jimmy Cawley, a Boston Democrat who works for WORK Inc., said he would be voting with his party, but he believes the differences between the candidates are more “nuanced.”

“I like Charlie Baker’s ideas. I like Martha Coakley’s ideas, and I’m impressed with Evan Falchuk. It’s not as cut and dry as other Democratic-Republican battles have been,” Cawley told the News Service. Noting that all the candidates were supportive of issues

important to human services workers, Cawley said, “When they say things out in public like this we can hold their feet to the fire when the time comes.”

Chris White, the CEO of Road to Responsibility and a Marshfield resident, said he is supporting Baker, who he said “dodges less” and gives “thoughtful” answers rather than “empty platitudes.”

“Nothing changed my opinion as to who I’m going to vote for,” said White. He said, “I think Charlie has a great grasp on what needs to occur in the Commonwealth going forward.”

Christopher Nzenwa, a Hyde Park resident who has opened a new fitness business and held a sign for Coakley outside Faneuil Hall, said her record over the years led to his support.

“We’ve been voting for Martha for a long time,” Nzenwa told the News Service. He said, “We are not against them, but we have to support whom we know.”