



Gubernatorial candidates Martha Coakley, Charlie Baker, Evan Falchuk, Jeff McCormick largely agree on human services

coakley baker falchuk mccormick

Massachusetts gubernatorial candidates, from left, Martha Coakley, Charlie Baker, Jeff McCormick, and Evan Falchuk (*Republican photo desk*)

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BOSTON - Four candidates for governor - Republican Charlie Baker, Democrat Martha Coakley and independents Jeff McCormick and Evan Falchuk – agreed on most issues relating to helping human service workers and their patients at a forum Wednesday at Faneuil Hall.

The forum was sponsored by the Providers' Council, an umbrella group of human services workers. Some of the most passionate discussion was about the need to fully fund a law, referred to as "Chapter 257" that would increase state salaries for human service workers, people who care in various ways for individuals who are children, elderly, disabled or mentally ill. The law was passed in 2008 to raise the state reimbursement rates to providers who contract with the state. But the law was never fully funded.

"I struggle to understand why the state doesn't follow it's own laws when it comes to protecting the most vulnerable populations in our midst," said Falchuk, who has held leadership positions at the health care company Best Doctors.

While the forum was not structured as a debate, the issue of reimbursements provided opportunities for the candidates to take digs at Coakley, the Massachusetts attorney general. The Providers' Council and other trade associations have **sued the state** for not fully implementing the law, and Coakley's office is defending the administration. Advocates point out that many human service workers earn less than \$12 an hour.

Falchuk said Coakley could sue the state to force it to follow the law. "I don't see why we should elect someone (as governor) who could do it now," Falchuk said.

Baker, a former health insurance executive at Harvard Vanguard, called Chapter 257 "the train that never gets to the station" and pledged to fully fund it. Baker said he committed to fund the law when he ran for governor in 2010. "I don't understand why we sit here with the Providers' Council suing the state of Massachusetts and the attorney general defending the state of Massachusetts on this question," Baker said.

Coakley responded that as attorney general, "My job is to represent the government when they are sued."

Coakley said as governor, she will make funding the law "a top priority." She added, "Chapter 257 to me is not the ceiling. It should be where we start."

There were few overt points of disagreement during the forum.

In a series of yes or no questions, all four committed to funding public health programs to address problem gambling, if the state's casino law is not repealed. All committed to convening a summit on domestic violence.

Only Baker would ban municipalities from signing payment in lieu of taxes agreements with non-profit community-based human service organizations. The others would not.

McCormick, who founded a venture capital firm, stressed his proposal to use technology to make health care more efficient. He said technology can help to coordinate care and lower costs. "You get better outcomes for less, it has a better budget for everyone in the field," McCormick said.

Asked about improving educational opportunities for human services workers, McCormick and Baker stressed the importance of online classes. Baker proposed giving workers salary incentives to take relevant courses.

Coakley mentioned her proposal to make junior college admissions need-blind.

Falchuk was the most aggressive during the forum. At one point, he criticized Coakley's recent approval of a deal that will allow Partners' Healthcare to take over two hospitals. Falchuk said the deal will increase costs to consumers, while Coakley responded that it will lower costs in the long term.

On the question of how to lower health care costs, Baker stressed the importance of transparency.

"You know more about your refrigerator and washing machine than about your health care," he said.

Coakley said the attorney general's office has shined light on the high costs of health care. She stressed the need to move away from a fee for service model and to integrate physical care with behavioral health care.

McCormick said the state needs to "rethink the model of delivery" by pushing more care to primary care doctors and working with community health centers to address the treatment of chronic diseases.

All four acknowledged the need to cut back on administrative burdens for human service workers.

"There's something in the water, something in the DNA, if there's a really complicated, preposterous way of doing something that takes forever, we will find it and we will love it," Baker said.