Opinion: Analysis of Massachusetts' gubernatorial candidates

by Max Cohen

The following is an objective analysis of the candidates running to become Massachusetts' next governor this November. Using the information from the candidates' sites and other sources on the web I will explain Martha Coakley's views on several important issues, and where possible will compare her to the Republican candidate Charlie Baker and vice-versa. I feel though that before I can begin I must advocate that anyone reading this should do more research in addition to reading this article, especially before casting a vote.

Charlie Baker is a former CEO, and Secretary of Administration and Finance under former Governors Weld and Cellucci. Meanwhile, Martha Coakley is the Attorney General for the state of Massachusetts following a successful career as both a prosecutor and District Attorney. With a little of our candidates qualifications in mind let's review a few of the issues in question.

The Economy and Jobs

There are few if any issues more important than this, in fact according to Gallup.com it's the most important issue to Americans followed by general dissatisfaction with the government at a close second. These days, people feel that the federal government is just not doing enough for them to improve their lives, and this creates an opportunity for state governments to come in and take the lead by example.

Martha Coakley aims to use transportation revenues and reinvest them in local projects focusing on repairing an "out-of-date" public infrastructure. Additionally she hopes that in part by advancing clean energy efforts and incentivizing certain company policies she can attract more companies to Massachusetts and grow those already here. Another important part of her economic policy involves expanding rights for workers, such as by closing the gender pay gap and affirming the right of workers to unionize freely, and by assuring that earned sick time is guaranteed for all workers.

Charlie Baker supports tax credits to offset the costs of implementing minimum wage increases, as well as changing or getting rid of some current tax laws including the corporate interest tax, which under his administration would allow any business earning a net income of $500,000 or less to be exempt from the tax. Additionally he believes that phasing out the state inventory tax as well as repealing the automatic gas tax increases will attract more business to the state and ultimately help owners of small and big businesses. Like Coakley, Baker intends to increase funding for local infrastructure projects and he also wants to create "Opportunity Zones" and "tax-free zones" in Gateway Cities to spur economic investment in these areas.

What these candidates say on their sites says a lot about them and their thoughts on policy; however what's even more telling is what has been left out. For example, in the section

dedicated to her economic policy Coakley doesn't mention phasing out the state inventory tax, so can it be assumed that she would be against such a thing? Furthermore, Baker doesn't mention closing the gender pay gap, which means we can only assume that, at the least, he may not have thought it an important part of the economic plan he's running on. Again though, the information I'm basing this on comes from their campaign websites and so my understanding may be incomplete, but still that doesn't change the fact that in his economic plan Charlie Baker saw fit to mention the dismissal of several corporate tax laws and that Martha Coakley saw fit to mention the gender pay gap. What these candidates mentioned and what they didn't in a paper meant for public consumption says a lot about them and their campaigns.

Of course a big part of these candidates economic plans are their ideas about education, and as expected they both wasn't to continue improving access to education and the quality of education being given. One interesting difference is that Mr. Baker's plan focuses more on connecting colleges, vocational schools, and high schools with potential future employers who can help provide needed experience, while a major part of Martha Coakley's plan focuses on increasing access to Pre-K early education as well as an expanded school day and special counselors in schools whose purpose would be identifying children in need and helping them to acquire any assistance they might need.

Another extremely important issue is healthcare, and judging by their campaign websites the two candidates have entirely different concerns facing the issue. Charlie Baker for example, wishes to procure a waiver from the Affordable Care Act and also wishes to get a waiver from Medicare in order to raise rates paid to primary care physicians. In theory, his administration expects this strategy to result in a boom of the number of primary care physicians causing them to be able to improve their care teams and thereby making healthcare more

efficient and affordable.

Meanwhile, Martha Coakley's policies are focused more on improving the availability and quality of behavioral health care. One of the suggestions she proposes is to integrate behavioral health care with primary care and other services, possibly alongside exchanging the current fee-for-services model with payment methods that would incentivize this integration. Another of her proposals is the establishment of peer support programs and to increase awareness and understanding of these diseases by furthering behavioral health education. In theory, her administration expects these strategies to help reduce some of the crime and homelessness in our state as well as the prevention of needless suicides.

In the end there is a limit to how much of these candidates and their policies I can capture in an article. So once again, I highly recommend any readers to do additional research, because regardless of what we may have come to believe it does matter. Our vote matters. The purpose of this article has not been to endorse either candidate, but to inform and hopefully inspire perspective readers to continue looking into the matter.