

Candidates evasive on casino repeal - Metro

Written by Administrator
Sunday, 18 May 2014 03:49 -

They position themselves as bold and gutsy truth-tellers.

But when asked about the thorny issue of casinos and whether they believe voters should be allowed to repeal the state gambling law, some candidates running for governor and attorney general resort to sidestepping and evasion.

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The refusal of several candidates of both parties to say whether they support placing a repeal referendum on the ballot in November and how they would vote on that question underscores how fraught the politics of casinos have become in Massachusetts, three years after lawmakers opened the state to Las Vegas-style gambling. The issue leapt into the public debate earlier this year after Attorney General Martha Coakley, the early frontrunner for the Democratic nomination for governor, said no to a proposed ballot question to repeal the casino law, ruling that it would violate the state Constitution. Casino opponents took the issue to the Supreme Judicial Court, which is [currently weighing](#) whether the ballot question passes legal muster.

Unlike more partisan issues such as taxes, the debate on the proposed ballot question has created unpredictable political crosscurrents among Democrats and Republicans, with some simply refusing to state where they stand.

In the governor's race, Democrat Steve Grossman would not say whether he believes voters should be allowed to repeal the casino law.

"Now that this important matter is in the hands of the SJC, I'm certain the court will make the right call and look forward to supporting it," he said.

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He added, however, that he would personally vote against a repeal of the gambling law, arguing it "holds the potential to create 15,000 good-paying jobs." Charlie Baker, the Republican gubernatorial candidate, was also evasive on the casino issue. He said he would support placing the repeal referendum on the ballot but would not say how he would vote on such a repeal. "Charlie will make that decision once it is determined whether it is on the ballot or not,"

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said his spokesman, Tim Buckley. In the attorney general's race, Democrat Warren Tolman initially declined to say where he stands on placing the question on the ballot, instead issuing a statement that spoke to his general philosophy on ballot questions. Pressed again for an answer, an aide said Tolman would vote against a repeal but "hopes it does get on the ballot." John Miller, a Republican candidate for attorney general, said he sees no constitutional reason to keep the question off the ballot but would not say how he would vote on the referendum. "If my personal views are made public, any decision that I make would be clouded and tainted by politics," he said. Boston College political scientist Dennis Hale said the candidates may be reluctant to state their views because "so many players have a lot invested in this, and by players I don't mean just the casino owners," but also powerful local officials and unions. Some candidates, however, were forthright in their answers. Democrat Donald Berwick, independent Jeffrey McCormick, and Republican Mark Fisher, all candidates for governor, said the question should be on the ballot, and said they would vote for it. "The evidence is strong that the casinos harm small businesses and distort the lives of neighborhoods," Berwick said. McCormick offered a similar argument, saying casinos "bring some obvious downsides, such as a predatory effect on hard-working people, increased crime, gambling addiction, and the potential erosion of surrounding small businesses." Fisher said casinos foster crime and addiction and "separate people from their hard-earned cash." Democrats Juliette Kayyem and Joseph Avellone and independent Evan Falchuk, all running for governor, said they would support placing the question on the ballot, but would vote against it. Avellone said that although he is "not a big supporter" of casinos, "we have a law that allows for local control, it is working and we should let it play out. I don't believe in government by referendum." Falchuk also said he would vote "no" on the repeal "because I think we are stuck in this country with an endless back-and-forth on so many issues." Coakley rejected the ballot question in May, ruling it would "impair the implied contracts" between gambling firms and the state and illegally break those companies' contract rights without compensation. If the SJC overrules her and places the repeal on the ballot, Coakley said she would vote against it. "If implemented correctly, gaming has the potential of creating thousands of jobs and millions in economic development," she said in a prepared statement. Maura Healey, a Democrat and former Coakley aide running for attorney general, said she disagrees with her former boss and believes voters should be allowed to repeal the casino law. She also said she would support such a repeal. "I believe casinos are bad for Massachusetts and that the state should support industries that create jobs without preying on consumers," she said.

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