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# Mass GOP gubernatorial candidates debate jobs, health care

By [Akilah Johnson](#) | GLOBE STAFF JUNE 02, 2014

For the first time since the acrimonious end to the state GOP convention, the Republican candidates for governor debated their views on health care, taxes, education, and jobs Monday.

The 60-minute forum brought into sharp contrast Charlie Baker's and Mark Fisher's stances on health insurance, climate change, and the minimum wage. Their views on tax reform, the permitting process for real estate developers, and casinos were hardly identical, but were more closely aligned.

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Fisher, a Tea Party movement candidate, sued the state Republican Party after he narrowly failed to secure enough votes to get his name on the primary ballot during a party convention in March, contending there was ballot tampering.

He is now on the ballot, but said after Monday's forum that he would drop the suit and his quest for damages if the party releases the original tally sheets.

"If the tally sheets come out, and they show no impropriety and everything was above board as they claim — I claim it wasn't — yeah, I'm prepared to drop the lawsuit and any further pursuit of damages," Fisher said. "Just come clean."

The forum was held in the Innovation District by the Massachusetts Competitive Partnership, Commonwealth Magazine, and an organization called A Better City. A similar forum was held last week for the Democratic candidates.

Fisher and Baker said that promoting casinos as a way to boost the state's economy is flawed. Baker said the state needs no more than one casino, while Fisher said he would vote to repeal the casino law.

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“I never thought casinos were a good thing,” Fisher said. “They can't bring real jobs to this state.”

Baker said Massachusetts cannot “absorb or figure out how to support as many casinos as we've been talking about in recent years. I always thought Mitt Romney had the exactly right answer on this when he was governor, that the state of Connecticut should write Massachusetts a check every year not to get into the casino business.”

The candidates differed on the role government should play in people's lives, with Fisher saying it should essentially be nonexistent. The minimum wage, he said, should be between the employer and the employee. Health care, he said, is a privilege, not a basic human right.

“If health care is a right, then why does the state have to impose it on us?” he asked. “Where I come from, a right comes from God.”

Baker said “access to health care is a basic right.” And to ensure that everyone is afforded that right, he said, the state's health care delivery system needs an overhaul, including making the price of care more transparent.

The same person can receive drastically different price quotes for the exact same medical treatment from different hospitals, Baker said. Knowing how much each medical institution charges for a service would “change the whole health care conversation in Massachusetts,” he said.

On climate change, Baker said the state needs to take the most “economically efficient” measures to reduce its carbon footprint, pointing to an energy efficient company that does not receive government subsidies.

Fisher denied climate change exists, calling it “bunk.”

“The science is not there,” Fisher said. “When I was in high school, they were warning us about the coming ice age. Then it was global warning . . . and now we talk about climate change. It's become politicized, and the scientists are out there making their way,

politicizing these things in order to get grants.”

Baker said the climate is “obviously changing.”

“There’s data out there to support that,” he said. “And I certainly think the rising carbon dioxide is a man-made, generated activity that plays a role in all of this.”

Both candidates agreed that Massachusetts needs to improve its economy and create jobs.

Fisher said job growth must come by giving companies the tools to be self-reliant, not government investing in “fad industries.” He pointed to the failed solar panel manufacturing company Evergreen Solar, which was based in Devens.

Massachusetts needs to do a better job turning students into residents, retraining them upon graduation, both candidates agreed. Because of the high cost of living and too few jobs, many students flee once they receive their degrees, Baker said.

“As the father of a son who graduated from college and immediately went to work in Chicago, I have personal experience with this,” said Baker, adding that his son lives two blocks from Wrigley Field, splits his \$1,500-a-month rent with two roommates, and has a view of Lake Michigan.

In Massachusetts, he said, part of what drives up the cost of housing is the state’s lengthy permitting process for developers.

“I’m back on my hobby horse about it takes too long, the permitting process. Land costs are too high.”

Baker said that drives up the cost of everything for what would be considered moderately priced, affordable housing for people like his son. His suggestion would be to transform empty swaths of land near railway lines into homes.

“Let’s get very aggressive with coming up with ways to get rental property that young people can afford to live in,” he said. “We are losing generations of big thinkers.”

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