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Politics

Senate hopefuls cover range of topics at forum

Forum shed little light on differences, attendees say

By Matt Rocheleau | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT JUNE 17, 2013

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MATTHEW J. LEE/GLOBE STAFF

“No one really outshined anybody,” one audience member said of candidates Gabriel Gomez (left) and Edward Markey.

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Nine days before they will square off in a special US Senate election, candidates Democrat Edward J. Markey and Republican Gabriel E. Gomez failed to woo some audience members at a Boston forum, with several saying they had a hard time finding differences in the candidates’ responses.

Markey at several points described Gomez’ opinions on certain issues as being the opposite of his own. But Gomez countered that Markey was oversimplifying his positions.

“He tries to mislead you, and he tries to make me out to be something I’m not,” Gomez said after Markey told the audience that Gomez plans to eliminate the home mortgage interest deduction.

Gomez said instead that while he would not rule out eliminating the deduction, he would try to avoid doing so.

The effect on the 75-person crowd was, for some, a forum where no one won.

Michael Josey, of Roxbury, said he probably will vote for Markey, but said the forum was “about even.”

“It’s a tough call. No one really outshined anybody,” he said. “There were a lot of issues discussed today. A lot of things were said, but we need things actually done when people are in office.”

Malden residents Nekita Lamour and Daniel Pierre, 57, said they were both still not sure how they will vote next Tuesday.

“They both said the same thing. They said what the community wanted to hear,” Lamour said.

The candidates answered more than a dozen questions on a wide range of issues: health care, affordable housing, jobs, immigration, military spending, transportation, the environment, gun control, taxes, student debt, and on the recent hot topic of rules on phone and Internet privacy.

The forum, held inside the Media Arts Center at Roxbury Community College, was moderated by Karen Holmes Ward, a host and producer for WCVB-TV Channel 5.

It was sponsored by 10 local organizations that each submitted one question for the candidates to address, followed by a select number of questions attendees wrote down on cards.

Gomez, a businessman and former Navy SEAL who has never held elected office, said he would bring a novel approach to the nation’s capital.

“Right now, we’ve got gridlock down in D.C. and I think what we’ve got down in D.C. is not working,” he said.

“We need somebody down there who is actually going to work across the aisle and take the best ideas from both sides. Because this election, it’s about the future. It’s not about the past. It’s about new and fresh ideas — not old and stale ideas. And it’s about putting the people before party and politics.”

“I want my kids and everybody else’s kids to have a chance at the American Dream,” Gomez added.

Markey, a US representative, has served in the House for nearly 37 years.

“

‘I want my kids and everybody else’s kids to have a chance at the American Dream.’

“I want to ensure that we continue to make it possible for every child to be able to reach the American Dream,” he told the crowd. “That we not take down that ladder of opportunity which has been there for so many families.”

“I want to go down and fight for your families,” he said later. “There is an idealistic pathway for our country that includes every single citizen regardless of race or income.”

In a special election scheduled for June 25, the candidates will vie for the seat formerly held by Democrat John Kerry, who left the office to become Secretary of State.

The latest Globe poll, released Sunday, showed Markey leading Gomez 54 percent to 41 percent with 4 percent of respondents saying they were still undecided. The poll of about 500 likely voters, conducted June 11 to June 14, has a margin of error of about 4.3 percentage points.

The candidates have one more debate, in Boston on Tuesday.

After Sunday’s forum, Donna Poland, 72, of Somerville, said she felt Markey sounded “very good” in the debate.

“He has more experience,” she said. “Republicans have old ideas.”

But, with a Markey button pinned to her shirt, she said she had been rooting for him since before attending the forum.

Malden’s Lamour said she plans to spend the next several days researching more about each candidate before making up her mind.

“I’ve got reading to do,” she said.

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