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LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR DEBATE

Healey faults Gabrieli for his business moves

By Corey Dade, Globe Staff, 10/26/2002

In the first debate among all five candidates for lieutenant governor yesterday, Republican Kerry Healey for the first time criticized Democrat Chris Gabrieli's past business dealings.

Healey was responding to Gabrieli's attack on her gubernatorial running mate, Mitt Romney, for his involvement in Damon Corp., a firm that pleaded guilty to defrauding Medicare. Healey pointed to a report in the Telegram & Gazette newspaper of Worcester about the fall of a clothing store chain, which went bankrupt after Gabrieli's former firm failed to expand the business.

"Chris, there isn't a dime of difference between Mitt Romney's career in business and your own. You have your own business failures that have been spoken about in the papers this week," said Healey, adding that the Worcester-based store, Maurice the Pants Man, was "driven into the ground" after Bessemer Venture Partners, of which Gabrieli was a general partner, and two other companies bought it. "Some businesses succeed, some businesses don't."

The remarks came in a wide-ranging debate that touched on the MCAS, the budget crisis, and bilingual education.

Coming a day after a raucous debate of the candidates for governor, the running mates stuck mostly to issues already defined by the gubernatorial campaigns. But it was one of the first times in a public forum that Gabrieli came under direct fire for his record as a businessman.

After the debate, Gabrieli defended his record, saying he only made money if companies he invested in succeeded, as opposed to Romney, whom he characterized as a corporate raider who profited from downsizing businesses through layoffs.

The presence of third-party candidates - Tony Lorenzen of the Green Party, Richard Aucoin of the Libertarian Party, and independent Joe Schebel - tempered bickering between Healey and Gabrieli.

At some moments when it appeared Gabrieli and Healey were baiting each, Lorenzen interrupted. In one instance, sparked by statements by Gabrieli, Lorenzen insisted moderator Joe Short- sleeve not indulge the repartee.

"The first thing an administration coming in has to do is be honest and ... Mitt Romney and Kerry Healey, I think, get the prize" on disingenuousness with their answers, Gabrieli said. "They won't sign a no new taxes pledge, but they say the

best reason to vote for them is that they won't raise taxes."

Gabrieli continued by casting doubt on Romney's proposed budget cuts. When he finished, Short-sleeve, a WBZ-TV anchor, tried to bypass Lorenzen, who was to speak next, in order to let Healey respond. Lorenzen objected, viewing it as an attempt to encourage another spat between the major-party candidates.

"Excuse me, but the point here is to stay in order. This is not a debate between two candidates," he protested. "Let us stay with the order."

Lorenzen, a religion and ethics teacher at Cathedral High School in the South End and the running mate of gubernatorial candidate Jill Stein, argued against the Unz initiative, Question 2 on the ballot that would replace bilingual education with English immersion. He said the state should consider a blend of both ideas to allow older students to remain in bilingual classes and place the youngest students, who are thought to learn English faster, in immersion courses.

"In California, people in immersion programs are leaving immersion programs at the rate of 10 percent a year. Already in Massachusetts, our bilingual programs are moving people out at 25 percent a year," he said. "We're already doing better than what the ballot question wants us to do."

Aucion, of Waltham, the running mate of Carla Howell, railed against big government and pushed for the passage of Question 1 to eliminate the state income tax, echoing Howell's mantra. Abolishing the tax would leave "\$3,000 in every pocket on average in Massachusetts and will create 300,000 to 500,000 desperately needed new jobs in our state," Aucion said.

Schebel, a carpenter in Agawam who is running with gubernatorial candidate Barbara Johnson, advocates increasing rights of fathers and grandparents in child custody cases. "The courts are set to continue to have parents fight at each other," he said. "It is time now that the Commonwealth adopt select, shared parenting."

The debate was taped at WBZ-TV (Channel 4) studios and will air today at noon.

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