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## **BAKER HOPING LAWMAKERS "FIND A WAY" ON BALLOT QUESTIONS**

By Andy Metzger

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BOSTON, APRIL 10, 2018....Fired up retailers railed against a proposed minimum wage hike Tuesday that they said would imperil their businesses.

"I understand we have low-paid workers, but where does it end?" asked Anthony Tierno, who runs Spin Cycle Laundromats with locations in Wakefield and Methuen. He said, "I just feel like, get out of my pocket. Get out of my pocket."

"We hear the anger and the angst in the room, and the concern and the fear, frankly," Sen. Jason Lewis responded, after the applause died down.

Speaking to retailers and other small business owners, Lewis and his Labor Committee co-chairman Rep. Paul Brodeur discussed ballot proposals to hike the minimum wage and mandate paid family and medical leave, which are currently pending before their committee.

If lawmakers pass bills that satisfy proponents of those policies, ballot campaigns could be avoided.

Lewis suggested some areas of possible compromise, wondering whether the minimum hourly wage could be raised to \$15 over a longer period of time than the four years proposed in the ballot question, or whether the state could establish a training wage.

Gov. Charlie Baker, who also spoke to the small business owners on Tuesday, hopes lawmakers can come up with a compromise.

The governor told small business officials gathered at the Omni Parker House about programs his administration has supported to ease dealing with state government, use infrastructure to spur development, create skilled workers, and ready coastal communities for the ravages of climate change.

When Baker was asked a question submitted by audience members about ballot questions in general, he said he would prefer that lawmakers find solutions.

"My hope is that we will find a way to work through some of this stuff in the context of the legislative process. I think we can probably do a better job of dealing with those issues that way than dealing with them through the ballot," Baker said. "I'm a guy who's participated in a lot of ballot questions over the years. I've won some and I've lost some."

The governor said he has a balanced view of ballot proposals.

"There are opportunities here to do some things that I think would be positive, but I also worry about some of the negative consequences of some of those questions as well," Baker said, urging small business officials to talk to their representatives and senators.

Supporters of the proposals backed by the Raise Up Massachusetts coalition argue the measures would provide greater economic security to workers, and that the minimum wage has not kept up with the costs of housing and other necessities.

Rep. Keiko Orrall, a Lakeville Republican who is running for state treasurer, said she opposes the paid family and medical leave, minimum wage hike, and surtax ballot proposals, and supports the ballot question backed by the Retailers Association of Massachusetts to lower the sales tax to 5 percent.

Asked if she thought the governor should take a position on those ballot questions, Orrall, who is also the state's Republican National Committeewoman said, "I don't know. I haven't spoken to him about it."

Rep. Joseph McKenna, a Webster Republican, received loud cheers when he told the crowd, "I will oppose these and I'll add my voice to yours."

Mary Grimmer, who runs the Little Treasures Schoolhouse daycare program, wondered how she would maintain her commitment to quality if new laws increase her expenses.

"Don't forget the cost of all the people who will be out of jobs," Grimmer told lawmakers.

Brodeur responded that most early education employees are "very poorly compensated," reporting that the average pay for those professionals in Massachusetts is about \$25,000 per year, and they are sometimes expected to obtain advanced degrees that cost far more than that.

"And yet, daycare and early ed is very expensive," Brodeur noted.

"Why can't the tuition go down?" interjected Ryan Maloney, owner of Julio's Liquors, fixing the blame on the cost of college. He said, "If the school's charging \$75,000 a year and they can only make \$25,000, how come we're not talking to the colleges?"

The minimum wage ballot question would also increase the minimum pay for tipped workers from \$3.75 per hour to the regular minimum wage over the next several years. Doug Bacon, a Boston restaurant owner, said that change represents a "serious threat" to his business and it would require him to "dramatically" increase his prices. When tips are factored in, his workers make at least \$20 per hour, he said.

Rep. Aaron Vega, a Holyoke Democrat, said he had supported the prior minimum wage increase that brought the hourly rate to \$11 in 2016, but he is more skeptical of raising it higher.

"I was like, 'Woah, we just got to \$11,' " Vega said, relaying his initial reaction to the proposed hike.

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