



BMG ENDORSES ALAN KHAZEI FOR SENATE

BMG's editors are pleased to endorse [Alan Khazei](#) for U.S. Senate, and we urge our fellow BMGers to back his candidacy. We support Khazei for two basic reasons: (1) he has the best positions on the issues; and (2) he has the best philosophy of governance. We'll consider those in turn.

The Issues

Let's take the most obvious issue first: Khazei (and Steve Pagliuca, of whom more later) took what we believe is the correct approach on the health care reform bill: a pragmatic attempt to improve the health and well-being of all Massachusetts residents to the greatest extent possible. This moment, right now, is very likely health care reform's only real chance. The Democrats will almost certainly lose seats in 2010, and we barely have the votes to pass a decent reform bill now. So unless the bill is so awful that it manifestly will not achieve the goals of health care reform, it should pass, and be fixed later as necessary. Restrictions on funding of abortions by insurance companies, as odious as they may be, do not justify denying the benefits of health care reform to millions of uninsured or underinsured women, children, and men -- particularly in Massachusetts, where (as we've [discussed before](#)) the restrictions seem likely to have relatively little impact. If a bill with a public option, the elimination of pre-existing condition limitations, federal subsidies for low-income people to buy health insurance, the creation of insurance exchanges, and the familiar litany of other useful reform provisions comes before the Congress, but with Stupitts or something like it attached, we think the bill should pass. That is Khazei's (and Pagliuca's) position; it is not Martha Coakley's or Mike Capuano's. We think Khazei is right, and we think this issue is very important.

Khazei has also paid the most attention to the critical issue of Afghanistan. As he's fond of noting, he's the only candidate who mentioned Afghanistan in his announcement speech, and he's also the only one to have issued anything like the [detailed statement on his website](#). While his reaction to President Obama's announcement this week remains to be seen, Khazei has been a strong and consistent voice throughout the campaign against sending additional troops to pursue an unclear mission now that al Qaeda has been largely eliminated from the country, and he has the most sophisticated and holistic approach to the difficult problem of ensuring that, once our troops leave, Afghanistan does not again become a haven for fanatics bent on our destruction. We agree with retired General Wesley Clark's assessment in his [endorsement](#) of Khazei's candidacy:

“Rather than make the easy appeal of simply bringing our troops home, Alan has done the hard work of detailing how to do so while insuring Afghanistan does not once again become a haven for terrorists. And, at the same time, Alan presents a comprehensive strategy for defeating the terrorists globally. Alan, more than anyone else running for Senate in Massachusetts, presented a detailed approach and compelling, new ideas for accomplishing our goals.”

Another clear distinction between Khazei and the other three candidates is the issue of casinos: Khazei is unequivocally opposed to bringing casino gambling to Massachusetts, while the other three are for it (with varying degrees of enthusiasm). Strictly speaking, whether or not MA legalizes casino gambling is not a federal issue (though there are federal aspects that our next Senator could face, such as the question whether Congress will revise the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 in light of this year's [Supreme Court decision](#) that made it much harder for the federal government to take land into trust -- the necessary precursor to building a tribal casino in Middleborough). But a Senate seat comes with a big bully pulpit, and we have no doubt that Khazei would use it (as he is [already doing](#)). Your three editors are not entirely in agreement on the casino issue, but two of us support Khazei's stand and appreciate his willingness to speak out about it, and the third is grateful for a candidate who at least has a coherent position.

Which brings us to the issue of jobs. This is of course a hugely important issue. And it's one on which, frankly, Khazei's campaign has botched his message. Bob [wrote some time ago](#) about the disconnect between Khazei's claim to have created thousands of "good jobs" and his record of service jobs that pay a sub-minimum wage stipend that entitles their recipients to food stamps; David [piled on](#), noting that Khazei was criticizing casino jobs that paid "only" an average of \$6.34 an hour, a good deal more than City Year's cash compensation. We wish that Khazei had more clearly explained that the service jobs he has created over the years, while admirable, are not what most unemployed MA residents will be looking for to feed their families or put their kids through college. City Year "jobs," while themselves valuable for other reasons, don't have much relevance to restarting the economy.

However, the service jobs are only one part of Khazei's [multi-part jobs plan](#), and the rest of it makes good sense to us. Furthermore, his [call for a Clean Energy Institute](#) whose "mission would be to fund commercially viable clean energy research through a collaborative effort with leading universities, state and local governments, business leaders, venture capitalists and other investors," is a creative and farsighted approach to both creating green jobs and encouraging development of alternative energy technologies, which in turns helps address both climate change and energy independence. Huge issues like these need big, bold ideas, and we think Khazei's are the best of all the candidates on that score.

In general, Khazei's [position papers](#) are the most detailed of all the candidates. Another candidate saw fit to [pooh-pooh](#) position papers since, in his view, "nobody in Washington is waiting for the senator from Massachusetts to be elected to bring their plan," but that's a little too high-handed for us. We want to know that our next Senator has something to bring to the table. We don't expect that all the plans will make it into the statute books next year, but we'd like to know that there's a place to start, and that he or she will think creatively about the big challenges facing our state and our country. Khazei has clearly done that.

Philosophy of Governance

Khazei, alone among the candidates, has repeatedly talked about bringing the people -- you, us, your friends and colleagues, everyone -- directly into the process of making policy in the Senate. And Khazei -- unlike [some politicians](#) who have talked a good game about this but haven't always followed through as completely as we might have liked -- has a superb track record in this area on which to build. Khazei has told (many, many times) the story of organizing a coalition that successfully pushed back Tom DeLay's move to gut AmeriCorps, and his work in moving the Kennedy Serve America Act through Congress. And in our interview with him, he [explained at some length](#) (it's the first health care question) how he intended to "empower and support a citizen movement" on issues that he wants to advance. Again, Khazei actually has a record on generating grassroots movements, and if anyone could successfully bring outside pressure into the halls of Congress, we suspect it would be Khazei. A more "people powered" Senate would surely be a good thing.

By contrast, the other candidates leave us a bit cold. Perhaps the clearest contrast is Mike Capuano, who has loudly and proudly touted his knowledge of how to work the system to bring home the bacon, and who, his commendable work on the ethics bill notwithstanding, seems to show little interest in changing the basic ways business is done in D.C. That's fine, as far as it goes. But we think Washington -- and, more importantly, the rest of the country -- could benefit substantially from some new ways of doing business. As a corollary, we are a bit unnerved by Capuano's cozy dealings with the perpetually-under-investigation John Murtha, and we see his [embarrassing association](#) with PMA Group as the kind of thing that predictably results when one is eager to do business with whoever is "the one who can help get the things done that I want to get done" (that's a direct quote from [what Capuano told us](#)) -- presumably as long as that guy hasn't yet been indicted.

Martha Coakley has done good work as Middlesex DA and as Attorney General, and in some cases (e.g., the settlement with Goldman Sachs) she's been excellent. But so far, we just haven't seen much evidence for her [claim](#) to be "a different kind of leader." What we see is a candidate who is trying to protect a perceived lead in the polls, not by ducking debates (there are plenty this week), but by saying little of substance during the course of them. We also see someone [unwilling to admit](#) even the slightest possibility of error in the Fells Acres prosecutions, in which she was not even directly involved, but as to which just about everyone who has taken a serious look has concluded that something went terribly wrong; and someone who sided with the state of Alabama in [a case](#) that, if Alabama wins, will likely lead to a mentally retarded person being executed (no, the [brief in question](#) didn't directly address the defendant's guilt or innocence, but one is hard pressed to completely ignore the context). We see, in short, a committed and successful prosecutor who hasn't yet made the case that she would be a "different kind of leader" in the Senate.

Finally, Steve Pagliuca. He talks a more or less unobjectionable game on the issues, but his personal "bad investments" (campaign donations to Bush in 2000 and Romney in 1994) and [his employer's bad behavior](#) (with respect to Ampad, KB Toys, and a number of [other](#) situations) leave us wondering how deeply held his progressive values really are. We'd be willing to take the chance for, say, state Senator. But U.S. Senator? No. We'll wait until there's more of a progressive track record there.

To be clear, though, we're not saying that we don't think Capuano, Coakley, or Pagliuca could make fine Senators. Actually, we think that any of the four candidates would represent Massachusetts honorably and well in the U.S. Senate, and we will happily and enthusiastically support the primary winner. But for the reasons given above, we're backing Khazei in the primary.

Finally, we cannot resist noting that whatever Khazei accomplishes in the primary will be a fine testament to the kind of people-powered politics that we think can only make the political system healthier. Khazei voters, whatever their final number, support him over the guy who carpet-bombed the airwaves with unlimited funds, the sitting A.G. with pre-existing name recognition and a statewide organization already in place, and the sitting congressman with the federal campaign account ready to go. Khazei is earning his voters by motivating a lot of volunteers to knock on a lot of doors and talk people into voting for their candidate. (In fact, his ground game, put together from scratch very quickly, may already lead the pack with a week to go.) If that works, it will bode well for the kind of change that Khazei says he wants to bring to the Bay State and to Washington. We hope he can pull it off.