

Candidates for New Jersey governor debate at Stockton

CHRISTIAN HETRICK Staff Writer May 10, 2017



Dale Gerhard / Staff Photographer

Buy Now

Republicans Jack Ciattarelli and Kim Guadagno exchanged a warm welcome then criticized one another's property-tax plans during the GOP portion of the night's event.



Autoplay: On | Off

GALLOWAY TOWNSHIP — Those running to replace Gov. Chris Christie debated for the first time Tuesday night in a primary debate doubleheader at Stockton University.

Republicans Lt. Gov. Kim Guadagno and Assemblyman Jack Ciattarelli sparred over their property-tax plans and accused each other of pandering to voters.

Images from the Gubernatorial Debate Tuesday at Stockton University





An hour later, Democratic candidates agreed on most issues, and rivals to frontrunner Phil Murphy, a former U.S. ambassador, rarely attacked him after initially criticizing his career at Goldman Sachs.

The debates were a major moment in a race where most voters are still undecided or unfamiliar with the candidates.

Some opponents trailing Murphy in the Democratic primary attacked him early. Former U.S. Treasury Undersecretary Jim Johnson and Assemblyman John Wisniewski each referenced Goldman Sachs in the opening minutes.

"If Mr. Murphy wants to create a state bank, maybe he should go back to Wall Street," Wisniewski said of Murphy's proposal for a public bank to fund infrastructure and education.

But the Wall Street references ceased after that until the end of the debate, when Johnson said Murphy couldn't provide the change the state needs.

"(The old playbook) got us Jon Corzine. It got us Chris Christie. It got us Chris Christie again," he said. "And if we don't stand up and open up this process to all of us, it will give us Phil Murphy."

Murphy didn't swipe at his opponents, though he defended his public bank proposal. He pointed out that Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders supports the idea. Murphy also described himself as the most qualified candidate.

"We need a governor of the right temperament, skills, the experience, life story," he said.

The candidates agreed on issues ranging from addressing climate change to relaxing marijuana laws. They advocated for shared-services agreements and better funding of public schools to reduce property taxes.

State Sen. Raymond Lesniak said he'd raise money to make payments into the public pension system by increasing income taxes on the wealthy, closing corporate tax loopholes and preventing companies from moving taxable income offshore.

"That would be enough money plus reforms in the budget to secure the pension payments for all the public employees in the state of New Jersey," he said.

On the Republican side, Guadagno and Ciattarelli traded attacks on each other's plans to reduce property taxes.

Guadagno's plan would cap a homeowner's property tax bill to a percentage of their household income. She plans to pay for this with savings from a government audit and additional revenue growth. Ciattarelli called the plan irresponsible.

"It is dependent on false savings from state audits and phantom revenues," he said.

Ciattarelli said any plan to solve the "property-tax crisis" must address school funding and suggested reducing excess state aid to overfunded school districts.

Guadagno claimed Ciattarelli's broader fiscal plan would be costly.

"Jack Ciattarelli's plan fails for 600 million different reasons. That's the cost of his plan," she said.

Guadagno leads the Republican race with 23 percent, followed by 12 percent for Ciattarelli, according to a May 3 Quinnipiac Poll. Nutley Commissioner Steve Rogers (5 percent) and entrepreneur Joseph Rullo (3 percent) didn't raise enough money to qualify for the debate.

In the Democratic race, Murphy is out front with 26 percent, followed by Johnson at 7 percent, Wisniewski with 5 percent and Lesniak at 4 percent. Activist Bill Brennan (3 percent) and Tenafly Councilman Mark Zinna (1 percent) did not qualify for the debate.

The primary election is June 6. The winners will square off in the November general election to succeed Christie, who is term-limited.

Contact: 609-272-7215 CHetrick@pressofac.com

Twitter @_Hetrick



Politicos take over Stockton for New Jersey gubernatorial debate



Republican candidates for governor debate Atlantic City issues

Christian Hetrick

Covered high school sports for The Philadelphia Inquirer. Graduated Rowan University in 2014.