



FIRM: Whangarei mayoral contenders say they will not endorse one of the two main candidates as long as many voters are undecided. PICTURE / JOHN STONE

Mayoral race outsiders battle down to wire

by Mike Dinsdale

The contest for the Whangarei mayoralty looks like a two-horse race, according to the *Advocate*/Group Research poll, but the other main competitors are still campaigning for as many votes as they can get.

Vince Cocurullo is in third place in the poll with 8 per cent support, Paul Jeeves is next with 4 per cent, Isopo Samu fifth with 3 per cent and Warren Slater has 1 per cent.

None of the four said they would pull out of the race to endorse one of the two main candidates and would still be pounding the hustings until the last minute.

Mr Cocurullo said 52 per cent of voters were still undecided and it was too big a number to ignore. He said if he continued campaigning he stood a chance of becoming mayor.

When asked if he would endorse those yet to vote to support either Mr Semenoff or Mr Cutforth as mayor his answer was unequivocal: "Hell no."

"I wouldn't support Stan Semenoff or Morris Cutforth if you paid me. There's no way in hell I would support them.

"That's one of the main reasons I'm standing for mayor only, and not council. After three years under Stan Semenoff there's no way I would want another three [years], while I don't think Morris has the skill base required."

As the newcomer, Mr Jeeves was not totally disappointed with his rating and said he would like to be first but was realistic about his chances.

"I'm also quite proud as I've only made people aware of who I am over the past three months. I think I've had quite a big impact in those three months," he said.

Mr Jeeves would not endorse another candidate, saying there were still too many people undecided.

Mr Samu said it was hard for candidates who did not have big budgets to register support as people tended to vote for the most recognisable faces.

As such, he was not surprised that the people who put the most into their campaigns had the most support.

"But people who have turned up to the [meet the candidates] meetings have told me they have changed their minds after listening to the candidates, but there's been a pretty low turnout to some of the meetings."

Mr Samu said not endorsing another candidate was about integrity.

"A lot of people are voting just to get rid of Stan Semenoff but for me there's no integrity in that. They should be voting for who they think is the best candidate, otherwise they will risk getting second-best just to get rid of the incumbent. I'm not prepared to compromise."

Mr Slater said he always felt an incumbent had the advantage of "three years of campaigning while in office, if they do it correctly".

"But we'll have to wait and see what happens on Saturday. There's still 52 per cent undecided and they could still change [the outcome]."

He won't be endorsing another candidate: "I don't give up."