

The Providence Journal: "Six congressional hopefuls tackle health-care policy"

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## Six congressional hopefuls tackle health-care policy

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PROVIDENCE — Six candidates for Rhode Island's two congressional seats faced thorny questions about health-care policy at two back-to-back forums Tuesday evening.

The candidates, who had been provided copies of the questions in advance, gamely tried to address such complex issues as patient-centered medical homes, the Medicaid funding formula, the federal health-care overhaul, and the mental-health parity law, at an event sponsored by the Rhode Island Mental Health and Addiction Recovery Coalition.

Three candidates for the 1st Congressional District seat being vacated by U.S. Rep. Patrick J. Kennedy faced off first, before a sparse gathering at Butler Hospital that started with about 30 people and dwindled to 15.

The Democratic candidate, Providence [Mayor David N. Cicilline](#), said he would work hard to carry out the intent of the mental-health parity law that Kennedy championed, which requires insurers to cover mental-health care in the same way they cover medical care. He also supports extending the higher levels of federal funding for Medicaid, and ensuring that veterans get all the mental-health care they need.

In his closing remarks, Cicilline pledged to fight the stigma that surrounds mental illness. "These are illnesses that have treatments that work," he said.

Cicilline's chief opponent, Republican John J. Loughlin II, did not attend. An aide told The Journal that Loughlin had long ago committed to a rally in Woonsocket.

Two lesser-known, independent candidates for Kennedy's seat spoke at the forum.

Kenneth A. Capalbo said he believed in universal single-payer health care, and criticized the new federal health-care law for not going far enough. Asked about homelessness, he suggested that the government buy up foreclosed homes and hire unemployed construction workers to turn them into affordable housing. He questioned whether the country would be able to pay for

treating all the post-traumatic stress disorder among veterans. “We do not support the troops, we betray them,” he said.

Gregory Raposa, whose visored cap and short-sleeved work shirt contrasted with the other candidates’ suits, said that he doesn’t believe in addiction-recovery programs except for veterans, because addicts can get off drugs on their own. He asserted that the Democrats and Republicans both were “ruining the country.”

“They keep screwing 95 percent of the population in favor of the 5 percent,” Raposa said.

In the second forum, U.S. Rep. James R. Langevin, the Democrat favored for reelection in the 2nd Congressional District, was joined by with Republican Mark S. Zaccaria and independent John O. Matson.

All three pledged to make sure the mental-health parity law was properly implemented. Zaccaria said, “One type of health care is as important and valuable as another.”

Langevin and Matson said they would support extending the higher federal contributions to Medicaid. But Zaccaria said the state needs to prepare for a time without “such largesse from the federal government” by giving individuals more control over their health-care financing through health savings accounts.

Langevin said he was proud to have supported the federal health-care overhaul, which he predicted would improve health care for all.

Matson took the occasion to thank providers of mental-health care for their help in difficult times for his family.

Zaccaria said that the nation’s fiscal crisis “has to be resolved if improvements are to occur.”

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