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Candidates for national office make their cases at RIBA

October 11, 2012 - Rhode Island

Four candidates for Congress, representing the entire 2012 political spectrum and all vowing to support the residential construction industry, visited Rhode Island Builders Association headquarters on September 4th to address the RIBA board of directors.

Republican candidate Brendan Doherty, running for the First Congressional District seat against whomever won the Democratic primary on September 11th, has a distinguished background in law enforcement and is a 24-year veteran of the Rhode Island State Police. He served as colonel of the State Police and superintendent of the Rhode Island Dept. of Public Safety from April 2007 to April 2011.

"I've always considered it my job to come in and eliminate waste, to fix inefficiency," Col. Doherty said. "And there is too much waste and inefficiency in the federal government."

He discussed the need for cutting spending and reining in the federal debt, loosening credit, tax reform and regulatory reform. He also called for better healthcare and energy policies.

Pointing out that there are some 93,300 businesses in Rhode Island, Col. Doherty commented that, "I ran the Dept. of Public Safety like a business."

He has been endorsed by the United States Chamber of Commerce.

In response to questions from RIBA directors, Col. Doherty spelled out his commitment to preserve Medicare in its current form. He expressed concern that reductions in provider reimbursements will encourage doctors to opt out of Medicare, making it difficult for seniors to find doctors.

He also emphasized that small businesses "can't take any more tax hits."

Also speaking to directors that evening was Michael Riley, a Republican who is challenging incumbent James Langevin for the Second Congressional District seat.

Riley is an accomplished, self-made businessman and financial manager who survived the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center. Seeking to come to terms with that experience and to redefine his life, he moved to Narragansett in 2003. He has since helped establish the Coastal Management Group (a Rhode Island-based investment advisory firm), and the top-performing hedge fund in the United States (2006-2007).

"Business growth, free markets and more jobs are the way out of the recession," Riley said. "There must be rules and regulations, but they must be rules that everyone must follow. Growth is the answer."

He also called for simplifying the tax code, which will provide "some certainty so businesses can plan a few years ahead," and for preservation of the home mortgage interest deduction.

Asked how one person among 435 members of the House of Representatives can make a difference, Riley pointed out that he could make as much difference as any other member. He also pointed out, along with the two other Republican candidates who addressed directors that evening, that the GOP is projected to maintain control of the House after the November elections, and that

Rhode Island will have greater influence if its representatives belong to the majority party.

Riley's opponent, Congressman Langevin, also spoke to directors, pointing out the need to close Rhode Island's "skills gap" with better career and technical education.

"The housing industry has a huge impact on the economy. Each new home built creates three jobs," he said.

Congressman Langevin, first elected in 2001, also promised to work for preservation of the home mortgage interest deduction, now threatened in Congress but considered crucial to new home sales. He also vowed to encourage Rhode Island job growth by working to keep Virginia Class submarine construction at North Kingstown-based General Dynamics Electric Boat.

In response to questions, Congressman Langevin defended his vote for the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (Obamacare).

The final speaker of the evening was Barry Hinckley, Republican candidate for U.S. Senate.

Hinckley is another self-made businessman. Starting out in his family's enterprise, Hinckley Yachts, he watched the family lose control of the company in the 1990s after the 1991 "luxury tax" drove away business. He later co-founded Bullhorn Software, which now employs 150 people.

"No matter how slow the economy may be, we have one thing that China and Europe don't: the American spirit," Hinckley said. "In this election, we have a choice between government interference that creates obstacles for business, or policies that remove obstacles to business."

He warned that the poor business climate and lack of jobs are making people Rhode Island's biggest export.

"We must create an atmosphere in which business can thrive in Rhode Island and throughout the country. I don't want to export my kids."

Hinckley drew nods from around the room as he recalled the many times that representatives from various regulatory agencies had visited his business.

"Not once did they ask, 'How can we help your business grow?'"

In Washington, he said he would work for a simpler and easier-to-understand tax code, a business-friendly regulatory environment, tort reform, educational reform, and the repeal of "Obamacare."

Hinckley vowed to exercise as much influence as possible at the State House to encourage a more business-friendly climate in Rhode Island and a "regionally competitive tax code."

First District Congressman David Cicilline and his challenger in the September 11th Democratic Primary, RIBA member Anthony Gemma, were unable to attend because of a previously scheduled debate.

Two other RIBA members are running for office. Related story on page 14.

The election takes place on November 6th.

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