

GRYMES HILL

# Congressional Dem hopefuls debate opioid crisis, health care



Two months before the Democratic congressional primary, the six Democratic candidates squared off on Wednesday night during a debate at Wagner College, Grymes Hill. From left are candidates Michael DeVito, Zach Emig, Radhakrishna Mohan, Max Rose, Paul Sperling and Omar Vaid. *Clifford Michel, Staten Island Advance*

**Clifford Michel** [cmichel@siadvance.com](mailto:cmichel@siadvance.com)

Two months before the Democratic congressional primary, the six Democratic candidates squared off on Wednesday, debating each other on how to address the opioid crisis and address Medicare.

The candidates disagreed with each other over how to best address the deadly drug crisis.

Several of the candidates said the solution is to restrict addictive medication, punish pharmaceutical companies or their executives.

"[We need] handcuffs, not fines," said Zach Emig, a Tompkinsville bond trader.

Michael DeVito, a Marine veteran and not-for-profit executive, agreed and added that he would vote for a House bill to remove marijuana as a schedule 1 drug so it could be more easily used as an alternative pain medication.

"It can be used in a meaningful way (instead of) opioids," said DeVito.

Max Rose, a Purple Heart veteran, said that putting \$25 billion towards education and treatment was the solution.

## ON HEALTH CARE

Omar Vaid, DeVito, and Paul Sperling, a 25-year-old who works in real estate, supported universal Medicare.

"We should be guaranteeing health care as a right," said Sperling.

Rose said that he supports giving a public option for health care in every state, expanding Obamacare subsidies, and covering "essential benefits" on a non-profit basis.

The U.S. Army combat veteran stopped short of endorsing universal Medicare.

"That would be easy for me to say and we can just walk away," said Rose. "The truth of the matter is I am not ready to put this entire system through radical transformation when we can establish universal health care in this country in a far less radical way...by extending Obamacare."

## ON INFRASTRUCTURE

DeVito said that he would support a \$2 trillion infrastructure package and would look to bring "shovel ready projects" to Staten Island. DeVito also said that he wants to begin building a new railway to the Island within a decade.

Sperling also supported bringing in a railway to the Island.

Rose mentioned that infrastructure should focus on 21st century projects such as a smart grid and cybersecurity.

The candidates were all largely receptive to some form of gun reform, including universal background checks and banning assault rifles.

The debate was co-hosted by Wagner College, the Staten Island Democratic County Committee and Swing Left.

A crowd of nearly 100 came to Spiro Hall's Room 2 at Wagner College on Wednesday evening to watch the debate between the six Democratic candidates. The forum was hosted by Swing Left is a liberal grassroots group with 300,000 volunteers formed after the Nov. 2016 election that's seeking to flip the House of Representatives to Democrats in the midterm elections.

The primary election is on June 26.