

# Dueling Elephants?

## A Republican Primary for Mayor

THE RHODE ISLAND REPUBLICAN PARTY HAS often been criticized for not fielding enough local candidates to run for the legislature. It's one thing to argue that incumbents are bad, or evil incarnate even, but when you can't even find candidates to run against them, that presents a problem.

But when it comes to running against Mayor Cicilline, the party, small in numbers though it may be in Providence, suddenly finds itself surprising rich in candidates, as not one but two Republican candidates will be squaring off for the unenviable task of taking on the popular incumbent. David Talan, a computer systems analyst, and Dr. Dan Harrop, a practicing psychiatrist and teacher at Brown University, have both run for office before, Talan for Mayor four years ago, and Harrop twice for State Rep against Edie Ajello. To add to the drama, Talan is the current President of the Providence Republican City Committee while Harrop is the current Treasurer.

So why two candidates for a seat where most people see little chance of anyone defeating Cicilline? Oh sure, people may have a problem or 2 or 5 with the Mayor and may vote against him and he has made political enemies within his own party. But you'll be hard pressed to find anyone with more than a rating of 3 on the political sense scale predicting he'll have a hard time winning re-election, short of any unforeseen catastrophes such as a black hole sucking City Hall into an alternative universe.

According to Talan, it has to do with the Senatorial primary between Senator Chafee and Mayor Laffey. Talan claims that since he supports Laffey, Harrop is running at the behest of the Chafee campaign, pointing to two young Chafee supporters on Harrop's staff as Exhibit A. Harrop denies this, claiming he never spoke to Chafee's people before running and the Chafee camp confirms this. (In a *Journal* article, Harrop did say that Chafee backers encouraged him to run but this election has nothing to do with the Senatorial race, whatever that means). While Talan wouldn't name names, he did say he knows the names of people in the Chafee campaign who approached Harrop to run. "If it looks like a duck..." said Talan (you can fill in the rest).

Harrop won the endorsement from the City

Committee in what appears to have been a hard fought contest, 12 – 10. But wait, there are 96 members of the City Committee. Where was everyone for such an important vote? Apparently, according to both candidates, this turnout is par for the course. Maybe they should stop scheduling important votes on city bowling night?

So how does this work – a City Committee chaired by a man who is the opponent of the person the Committee endorsed? Harrop has called for Talan to resign due to a conflict of interest. Besides, according to Harrop, Talan hasn't done a very good job as Chairman, pointing to a number of things such as the need for more and stronger people, lack of funds and poor recruiting of candidates, claiming Talan only recruited 18 of 35 positions (Talan pointed out it was actually 23 out of 35 which in Providence isn't bad).

In his defense, Talan said that Harrop was assigned to be on a Finance Committee to raise money to support candidates but did nothing, nor did he do much to organize Ward 2 when he was assigned by Talan as Chair. Talan said he was notified of Harrop's desire to run a day before the press release went out.

Talan said he had no intention of stepping down. "There is no conflict since the City Committee does nothing meaningful in the Mayoral primary," he said. As for the endorsement, Talan said it was meaningless. "I didn't campaign for the endorsement; instead I spent my time trying to recruit candidates," Talan said. OK. It may sound strange when the head of a City Committee says the Committee and endorsement are meaningless in a Mayoral Primary, but maybe no stranger than a Treasurer complaining about, among other things, lack of funding by the Committee to do anything.

Notwithstanding the disagreement regarding either's job performance, the two candidates agree on a number of things, including the two primary issues where they think the Mayor's performance has been lacking: education and city finances. However, they disagree on some points as to how to deal with these issues.

For example, when it comes to education, Talan proposes making it much easier for students to attend private schools, via \$4,000 stipends. Harrop says this idea is goofy (my word, not his), since the \$4,000 only deals with tuition and doesn't cover the subsidy that

pays for private education. Harrop favors building a stronger public school system and lifting the cap on charter schools. He doesn't support school regionalization, such as combining Providence, Pawtucket and Central Falls, but does support regionalizing some services, such as school transportation.

On the issue of the Nathan Bishop and other school issues on the East Side, Harrop supports a new K-8 school but thinks the city might be better off purchasing a new building, rather than refurbishing Nathan Bishop and bringing it into compliance. Talon doesn't buy the "build it and they will come" philosophy that argues East Siders would send their kids to a quality neighborhood public school. He'd rather see the building sold or perhaps refurbished and used by the Jewish Community Day School and/or other agencies.

On the fiscal front, Harrop pledges to keep property taxes stable for two years, something he will accomplish by selling property the city doesn't need, privatizing the water service and regionalizing some services. Talon doesn't believe in privatizing water services, but thinks the use of vouchers will save \$25 – \$50 million in school costs and wants the city to adopt Mayor Laffey's taxpayer relief act that will relieve cities from paying for unfunded city mandates, among other things.

Talon thinks he has a stronger chance to beat Cicilline because of his contacts with both Democrats and Republicans. He says he is out in the community more than Harrop and doesn't expect all the Chafee voters to vote with Harrop. Harrop says that Talon has no administrative experience while Harrop has run a number of community mental health centers and quasi-public agencies.

As for defeating Cicilline, Talon think there is enough dissatisfaction to vote the Mayor out and points out that history is full of candidates who were not supposed to win. If Cicilline self-destructs, he'll be there to pick up the pieces. Harrop feels that when people hear his education and fiscal plans for the city, including the pledge not to raise taxes for two years, they'll vote for him.

Meanwhile we do hope that Talon and Harrop have one important thing in common when it comes to proposals for the city.that they won't be scheduling any important city meetings on bowling night.