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Four Republicans vying for 11th Congressional District seat

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January 22, 2010

BY LAUREN FITZPATRICK

Smaller government and lower taxes are the only things the four Republicans vying for the 11th District congressional seat apparently can agree on.

Ad am Kinzinger, David McAloon, Henry Meers and Darrel Miller spent a sometimes testy 90 minutes recently with the SouthtownStar's editorial board, explaining how each would best represent the diverse district. One of them will face Democrat Debbie Halvorson, who won in 2008, replacing Republican Jerry Weller.

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Even before Tuesday's stunning victory by a Republican in the Massachusetts race for U.S. Senate, the Republican Party has been determined to regain the 11th District seat, which Weller had held since 1995. Halvorson, whose freshman status already made her vulnerable, has supported President Barack Obama's health care plan, which voters in Massachusetts apparently shot down.

And in a rare move for a primary race, the National Republican Congressional Committee has endorsed Kinzinger, 31. A former McLean County Board member who made five trips to Iraq and Afghanistan as an Air Force pilot, Kinzinger said he's received \$4,000 from the party, which says he represents the new kind of young Republican it needs.

During the editorial board meeting, McAloon and Meers took as many shots at Kinzinger as at Halvorson, slamming his endorsement.

"We should pick our people in a primary, not Washington," Meers said.

McAloon, a former Tinley Park resident, identifies strongly with Tea Party Republicans and cited the Constitution as the answer to several questions. McAloon believes the federal government is too sprawling and should not be involved with most public services.

Comparing himself with Kinzinger, he said, "Even though I'm not in the armed services, I take my position as a U.S. citizen very seriously." Election records from Kankakee and Cook counties show that McAloon did not vote in primary or general elections in 2005, 2003, 1999 or 1997. He later recalled missing one, possibly the 2005 date, but called the other omissions "incorrect" on behalf of the county clerks.

Meers, who works in finance, also advocates for smaller government and more tax cuts to keep money in consumers' pockets instead of in Washington. Meers, of Frankfort, has the support of former candidate David White, who recently quit the race.

Miller, a farmer from Danvers, described himself as the least conservative guy at the table, pushing for more government financial regulation.



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guy at the table, pushing for more government financial regulation.

"Financial reform is not an orthodox Republican position," he said, adding that his conservative identity is rooted in his social values opposing abortion and homosexual marriage.

• **Fundraising:** Kinzinger led the GOP pack for fundraising as of the last deadline to file campaign finance documents, Sept. 30, with about \$150,000 in cash. McAloon raised \$1,000, but has \$3,000 in debt. With less than \$5,000 each, Meers and Miller haven't had to file.

• **South suburban airport:** McAloon, Meers and Miller oppose the proposed airport near Peotone; Kinzinger supports it. Each said he'd use his federal office to advance his cause.

• **Earmarks:** Kinzinger wouldn't bring money home that "doesn't serve a very public interest," calling transportation money fair game. Miller supported any earmarks a congressman requested in public, saying, "The reason they have earmarks is because they couldn't argue before people with a straight face for it." Meers said all earmarks are proof income taxes are too high. When asked about earmarks, McAloon started reading the Constitution's preamble aloud from a booklet.

• **Thomson prison:** McAloon, Meers and Kinzinger oppose moving combatants from the prison at Guantanamo Bay. McAloon would leave "the terrorists" at Gitmo saying, "They want to kill our family, our friends, our neighbors, our schools."

Miller alone said rejecting Thomson for safety reasons would be embarrassing. "If we can't handle prisoners on our own soil at that place, then we're not speaking very well of ourselves," he said.

Meers said detainees don't "deserve any rights whatsoever. In the old days, they would have just shot them. I don't see any reason to bring them up here except to save Obama's hide."

Kinzinger said moving detainees to Thompson would hand terrorists a new recruiting tool.

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