

# House hopefuls debate Vt. health care

By **GORDON DRITSCHLO**  
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Private health coverage options — from tweaking the system to throwing it out — were tossed around by a trio of candidates for Congress on Wednesday evening.

About 30 people attended the candidates' forum at the Godnick Adult Center in Rutland. Sen.

Peter Welch, D-Windsor, Sen. Mark Shepard, R-Bennington, and Rep. David Zuckerman, P-Burlington, took turns speaking and answering questions.

The health care forum was sponsored by Democracy for America.

Organizer Jennifer Falker said likely Republican candidate Maj.

Gen. Martha Rainville, head of the Vermont National Guard, was invited but did not respond. Dennis Morrissette, the first announced Republican candidate last summer, was not invited because the group did not know he was running when invitations were sent out in early January, she said.

Welch said every successful

national health care system in the world has two features.

"Every citizen is covered, and every citizen has to pay according to his ability," he said. "I would be part of an effort working within Congress to incorporate those two principles."

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**Peter Welch (Windsor) speaks at the Democracy For America meeting held at the Godnick Center Wednesday evening in Rutland.**

# Candidates

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Zuckerman, who said he is not yet "fully declared" as a candidate, went a step further.

"I'm willing to say, let's raise taxes to have universal health care," he said. "I'm not afraid to say that."

Shepard, on the other hand, said he approaches health care from a market perspective.

"What is the market?" he asked. "To me, the market is a means that connects the consumer to the product as well as possible so the consumer gets what he wants."

Shepard went on to talk about how competing auto companies from Japan eventually made American cars better, saying the same principle can work in health care.

"Cosmetic surgery is going up less than the rate of inflation and people are getting services they want," he said. "You can't take that over directly to the rest of health care because cosmetic surgery is optional, but there's a lot to learn from that."

Zuckerman argued that the competitive model did not have a good track record in health care.

"Texas has the most choice of any state," he said. "They have 88 companies. They also have the most number of uninsured — 25 percent. More choice does not mean more coverage. There are big government single-payer systems around the world that cost less than our system now."

Welch, like Zuckerman, argued that "more options is less options," saying that out-of-state insurance companies were likely to deny a variety of services.

"Competition among these companies is about writing policies for people who are not going to get sick and leaving the hospitals and state health care system with the people who are going to get sick."

Shepard's answer to that problem was giving everyone who is insured an across-the-board tax cut and then spending government money on the hospitals to help care for the uninsured.

"I don't think there is any question that our system is dysfunctional," he said. "The question is how do you make it better? ... There's going to be people who fall through the cracks. We need to have a safety net for them, but if you start with a safety net, you have problems."

While Shepard questioned the assumptions behind universal health care, Zuckerman said he questioned the assumptions behind private health care, saying health care should not be a for-profit industry.

"I don't think people should be making money off investing and gambling on people being sick," he said. "That's just bizarre."

Welch said people need look no further than Medicare for a working model.

"Medicare is taxpayer-financed and it's totally privately run," he said. "In a good world, we'd have Medicare for everyone."

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