

Harsch and Lynch set to debate

By Dotti Farrington

J. William W. Harsch of Jamestown, Republican candidate for state attorney general, and Patrick C. Lynch, Democratic incumbent, are scheduled to take part in three debates in coming weeks.

Harsch called for several debates and recently criticized Lynch for canceling one that was to have been taped for Jim Hummel's ABC 6 news program.

Now the two apparently have agreed on three debates: tomorrow, Oct. 20, on radio WPRO; Sunday, Oct. 22, on WPRI TV 12; and Sunday, Nov. 5, on WJAR TV 10.

Harsch originally asked for live audience forums throughout the state before the Nov. 7 election as well as media appearances, but said he was pleased with any schedule. A Lynch worker said there might be one or more added debates.

Lynch has come under scrutiny for his handling of the prosecution

of the Station nightclub fire, and Harsch is hoping to elicit some explanations of Lynch's role in that matter.

Harsch, a Providence attorney and former state environmental and public utilities official, has been working to pit his maturity and experience against Lynch's youth and performance. Harsch has identified his campaign issues as weak sex offender notification rules, the leniency of sentences for those found responsible for the Station nightclub fire, questionable handling of funds involved in lead paint settlements and campaign donations, and the need for reducing utility and healthcare rates.

Lynch has pointed to his work to get tougher sentences for drunk drivers, help for seniors who were abuse victims, as well as penalties against lead paint corporate principals.

Harsch has also cited "the implications of political corruption on a statewide level. Rhode Island's culture of corruption dissuades economic development, discourages civic participation, and casts doubt over our judicial system. Rhode Island has had more than its share of scandals involving public officials. Rhode Island's cadre of lobbyists and special interest has infiltrated the state's political process where it threatens to undermine our civic and economic

culture."

Harsch criticized Lynch for inaction on corruption. He said, "As scandals have been exposed and Rhode Island's reputation for public corruption has grown, the attorney general's office has been glaringly absent. For too long, the investigation and prosecution of public corruption in Rhode Island state government has been outsourced as the U.S. attorney has stepped in on cases where the attorney general has inexplicably hung back."

Harsch has proposed a public corruption unit in the attorney general's office, creation of a public corruption tipline, a joint commission on election fraud, and stiffer penalties for convicted officials, including mandatory jail time, pension forfeiture, and financial penalties. Full details of his plan are at www.BillHarsch.com/anti-corruption.pdf

Harsch also accused Lynch of denying federal investigators access to evidence and interviews in their independent study of the Station nightclub fire.

He said the attorney general, as the state's chief law enforcement officer, must foster honesty, ethics, and transparency in government while holding those who abuse the public trust accountable to the strictest standard of law regardless of political affiliation or influence.



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