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Roger Williams University School of Law

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Newsroom

AG Candidates Debate at RWU Law

Rhode Island's five Attorney General candidates -- led by two RWU Law alums, Eric Wallin '97 and Peter Kilmartin '98 -- debated here Tuesday night.

The Attorney General candidates' debate at RWU Law Tuesday night earned above-the-fold, front-page coverage in the *Providence Journal*. The debate was moderated by RWU Law Professor **Bruce Kogan**, and RWU Law professor **Jared Goldstein** sat as a member of the panel firing questions. The field is led by two RWU Law alums, Republican **Eric Wallin '97** and Democrat **Peter Kilmartin '98**. On Wednesday, the ProJo published "[Five attorney general candidates make their case in debate](#)" by Journal Staff Writer John Hill:

BRISTOL, R.I., October 13, 2010 -- The five candidates for attorney general were at **Roger Williams University** Tuesday night, each trying to make the case that he would be the best lawyer for the citizens of Rhode Island.



The quintet, **Democrat Peter F. Kilmartin [RWU Law '98]**, Moderate Party nominee Christopher H. Little, **Republican Erik B. Wallin [RWU Law '97]** and independent candidates Keven McKenna and Robert E. Rainville all noted that the office involves more than just criminal prosecutions, as they discussed immigration, health care and environmental issues.

Sponsored by **Roger Williams University School of Law** and the Rhode Island Center for Law and Public Policy, the event was held at the law school's appellate courtroom lecture hall. The front of the room was built like an appellate courtroom, with a paneled wall stained in dark cherry and a matching judges' bench, where the candidates sat.

Each tried to make the case that he would be the best to fight government corruption. Kilmartin said as a police officer, he'd had to arrest fellow officers. But Wallin, who repeatedly said he was the only candidate with experience prosecuting felony charges, said Kilmartin's 20 years as a legislator meant he wasn't the one to watch over his former colleagues.

When asked about resisting cronyism in hiring, Little, a former chairman of Common Cause Rhode Island, said he was from the Moderate Party, which hasn't been around long enough to get cronies.

There were areas of general agreement. All said they supported police departments tape-recording interviews with suspects, though Wallin said he would seek to persuade police departments, rather than seek legislation forcing it.

All five were asked if they would reopen the Station nightclub fire investigation, and while they all supported reviewing how the case was handled, none said he thought a new criminal prosecution was possible after so many years.

McKenna said there would be statute of limitations and evidence problems. Wallin said he understood the desire for further investigation, especially on the point of how West Warwick officials handled their public safety duties in the case. Kilmartin and Little said they would approve reexamining the case to see if new charges were possible, but they said they thought that unlikely.

Little said he'd like an evaluation of how the case was handled, particularly the role the town officials played. Rainville told of an adoption case that he dealt with as probate judge in West Warwick, and said he would like to see if any avenues were missed.

For various reasons, McKenna, Rainville and Wallin all said, if elected, they would contest the new federal health-care law in court. Wallin said he feared the legislation would leave the state with the responsibility for paying for it; McKenna said he was against the requirement that people either get coverage or have to pay what he called a fine, and Rainville said he didn't like the federal government dictating health care to the states.

Kilmartin came out with a ringing endorsement of the program. He said it provided coverage for children, including those up to 26 years old, as well as other protections. Little said he thought it was far too soon to talk about going to court over a law that won't take full effect until 2014. The attorney general's office should be concentrating on more immediate concerns instead, he said.

On environmental issues, all five candidates vowed to continue to oppose a liquefied natural gas terminal in Mount Hope Bay. Little said when Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse was attorney general, he met regularly with environmental groups to hear their concerns, a practice he vowed to resume.

McKenna said he would work to abolish the state's Traffic Tribunal, which he said was more of a job-placement program for the politically connected. Instead, he said, the state should turn traffic enforcement over to municipal courts and use the Traffic Tribunal space for criminal cases.

On immigration, Wallin said if elected he would have the state's law-enforcement officials check the immigration status of suspects, and report it the federal government. He said the failure of the federal government to secure the nation's borders and enforce existing laws compels the state to step up and protect its citizens.

Kilmartin said, as a police officer, he often checked a suspect's identity papers and saw no problem with reporting those findings to the federal officials. Little said he was uncomfortable with the policy because the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency's own inspector general found the ICE training program for local officials was inadequate and could lead to racial profiling.

McKenna said the policy could lead to profiling. Rainville said he didn't want to see state officials enforcing federal laws.

They used questions to take shots at each other records. McKenna's law firm's bankruptcy proceeding came up, and he used it as a chance to denounce the Workers Compensation Court; Wallin aggressively went after Kilmartin as a State House insider, and Rainville repeatedly sought to frame issues as a Democratic-Republican party dispute he would avoid as an independent.

The funniest moment was when Little held up an old copy of the Pawtucket Times, with a picture of Kilmartin hugging Central Falls Mayor Charles D. Moreau, currently under investigation by state police.

After an awkward moment, Kilmartin leaned over and put his arm around Little.

For full story, click [here](#).