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Newsroom

Cicilline Recalls Law School Days

Congressman David Cicilline quietly paid a lunch-hour visit to RWU Law, reminiscing about his law school days, and reflecting on today's divided Congress.



You never know who you'll run into at the School of Law – prominent lawyers, top judges, policymakers from all levels of government. Earlier this month, Congressman David Cicilline (D-RI) slipped in without fanfare or entourage to enjoy lunch and candid conversation with a few dozen RWU Law students.

"I always knew I was interested in politics," he said. Growing up in Narragansett, Cicilline became interested in public service for the first time, regularly asking his parents to drop him off to attend school board and Town Council meetings. As a teenager, he organized a successful petition drive demanding that his school add Italian language classes to its curriculum. After graduating from Narragansett High School, Cicilline attended Brown University as an undergraduate and later earned a law degree from the Georgetown University Law Center.

"I completely loved law school," he said, adding that the skills he learned there still serve him "very directly" every day. "It made me a better thinker, a better writer, and a better advocate of evidence-based public policy."

It has also helped him navigate the Byzantine complexity of the bills that come across his desk in Washington. "Being a lawyer has definitely helped," he said with a smile. "At least you can read this stuff!"

In a time when public approval percentages of "the way Congress is handling its job" hover in the low teens and single digits, Cicilline blamed factions invested in proving that "the government can't do anything positive." For them, he asserted, a government shutdown is "the ultimate success."

"It's dangerous that the country has lost confidence that Congress can do anything to help the people," he said.

In response to questions on gerrymandering and the U.S. Supreme Court's controversial *Citizens United* decision, Cicilline closed on a partisan note. "In the end, a majority of the American people agree with us [the Democratic Party] on almost every issue," he said. "On an even playing field, we win."

Congressman Cicilline has long been a friend of RWU Law, having taught Advanced Criminal Procedure here as an adjunct professor, and even served as auctioneer at the school's annual Public Interest Auction.

Born in Providence, Cicilline began his career as a public defender in the District of Columbia before returning to Rhode Island to practice law. In 1994, he was elected to the Rhode Island House of Representatives. He was elected mayor of the City of Providence in 2002, and re-elected for a second term in office four years later in 2006. In 2010, after Representative Patrick J. Kennedy announced his decision to retire from the House, Cicilline decided to run for his seat. After winning the general election, he was sworn in on January 5, 2011.

As a member of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Cicilline has strongly advocated bringing U.S. troops home from Iraq and Afghanistan as safely and expeditiously as possible. He has also co-sponsored legislation to create a National Infrastructure Bank, "which would allow the Federal government to leverage public and private funds to put people back to work rebuilding our roads, schools, water systems, and more – right here at home."

Congressman Cicilline's visit was sponsored by RWU Law's Association for Public Interest Law, an all-student organization.