

NATIONAL COUNCIL ON ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG DEPENDENCE – NEW JERSEY
1675 WHITEHORSE-MERCERVILLE ROAD, SUITE 205, HAMILTON, NJ 08619

CONTACT: Daniel Meara
609.689.0121 x 102
dmeara@ncaddnj.org

Candidates Make Poor Showing In NCADD-NJ Addiction Issues Survey

TRENTON ... (October 29, 2002) - The National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence-New Jersey distributed a survey on addiction issues to each of the state's 27 candidates for Congress in this year's general election, but the response rate was as disappointing as voter turnout in a school board contest. Fewer than a quarter of the candidates took the opportunity to respond to questions about what the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has stated is the nation's number one public health problem. At the state level, 90 percent of New Jersey residents consider addiction to be a pressing problem, according to an Eagleton Institute survey commissioned by NCADD-NJ in the spring. The seven candidates who did reply to the survey displayed familiarity with the issues and generally favored a public health approach to addiction.

NCADD-NJ's Director of Public Affairs and Policy John Hulick said, "The responses of the candidates who did participate in the survey show that members of both parties understand that the issues concerning addiction, from underage drinking to insurance parity to non-violent offenders, are matters of public health. However, it's unfortunate that more of the candidates did not see fit to contribute to this discussion of such important issues."

The survey covered subjects including measures to curtail youth use of drugs and alcohol, remedies to treatment capacity shortfalls, possible solutions to the limited care for addiction private health insurers presently offer, and exploring alternatives such as drug courts for non-violent offenders.

There was agreement among the candidates who responded that addiction to alcohol and drugs is a preventable and treatable chronic disease, comparable with diabetes and hypertension. All of the candidates favored a public health approach to addiction and felt the country should pursue demand reduction efforts including prevention and treatment. Only two candidates, incumbents Rep. Robert Andrews, of the 1st District, and Rep. Rush Holt, of the 12th District,

-more-

CANDIDATE SURVEY

PAGE 2

thought medical use of marijuana should be permitted.

In the area of reducing youth use of alcohol, the candidates unanimously favored the implementation of a national media campaign to delay early first use. Such a delay in using alcohol has been shown to decrease the likelihood of difficulties arising from future alcohol use, and waiting until the age of 21 before drinking almost eliminates the chances of developing a drinking problem during one's lifetime. The proposal for an increase in the alcohol tax to help create an economic deterrent to youth drinking had the approval of not quite half of the candidates.

The decline of private dollars spent on treatment has largely resulted from the influence of managed care, which by placing tight restrictions on care causes those with alcoholism or another addiction to turn to public sources for treatment. All of the candidates concurred that insurance parity should be adopted to reverse this trend. Most thought it a good idea to establish office of addictions services ombudsman to assist with insurance consumer issues, and most also believed it would be a good policy to use a neutral mechanism to make addiction treatment determinations.

To address the limited treatment capacity for addicted individuals, the respondents unanimously agreed on the need for a treatment on demand initiative and all also favored increasing the federal substance abuse block grant to help reduce the treatment shortfall. Another funding source that most agreed with was dedicating drug forfeiture money to expand treatment.

The survey's questions on criminal justice and treating addicted offenders elicited support from all respondents on whether first- and second-time non-violent offenders should be given the opportunity to receive treatment rather than incarceration. A large majority thought treatment belonged as a key part of the criminal justice system and believed the federal government should provide support for drug courts' earlier intervention in offenders' criminal behavior and drug use.

The candidates for the House of Representatives who responded to the survey were: incumbent Democrat Rep. Robert Andrews, in the 1st District; Democrat Mary Brennan, challenger in the 4th District; Republican Ric Medrow, challenger in the 6th District; incumbent Democrat Rep. Bill Pascrell, Jr., in the 8th District; incumbent Democrat Rep. Steve Rothman, in the 9th District; and in the 12th District, the only district in which both major party candidates responded, incumbent Rep. Democrat Rush Holt and the challenger, Republican DeForest Soaries.

CANDIDATE SURVEY

PAGE 3

Neither of the candidates for Senate, Republican Doug Forrester or Democrat Frank Lautenberg, responded. The non-respondents running for the House of Representatives were: incumbent Republican Rep. Frank Lobiondo and Democrat Steve Farkas in the 2nd District; incumbent Republican Rep. Jim Saxton and Democrat Richard Strada in the 3rd District; incumbent Republican Rep. Chris Smith in the 4th District; Democrat Rep. Anne Sumers and Republican Scott Garrett in the 5th District; incumbent Democrat Rep. Frank Pallone in the 6th District; incumbent Republican Rep. Mike Ferguson and Democrat Tim Carden in the 7th District; Republican Jared Silverman, challenger in the 8th District; Republican Joseph Glass, challenger in the 9th District; incumbent Democrat Rep. Donald Payne and Republican Andrew Wirtz in the 10th District; incumbent Republican Rodney Frelinghuysen and Democrat Vij Pawar in the 11th District; and incumbent Democrat Rep. Robert Menendez and Republican James Geron in the 13th District.

This is the second election in which NCADD-NJ has surveyed candidates on addiction issues. The survey may be accessed at the council's website, www.ncaddnj.org. NCADD-NJ, which has dedicated itself to educating the public about addiction issues, to advancing policies affecting individuals addicted to alcohol and other drugs and to reducing stigma, is marking its 20th year of service in New Jersey.

###