

Candidates split on Medicare Part D, other health issues

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Editor's note: This is the last of a weekly series of stories looking at where the 10th Congressional District candidates stand on the issues. The series can be read at dailyherald.com.

Republican U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk says the country should cap pain and suffering awards to medical malpractice victims. He also thinks Medicare's prescription drug plan for seniors has been a major success.

Democratic candidate Dan Seals thinks lawsuit caps won't work, and argues the drug program has been muddled and confusing for seniors.

Millions of people across the country don't have health insurance, making health care a key issue nationally for congressional races.

The candidates in the 10th Congressional District are split on some important health care issues, and those differences could be key as some predict the Nov. 7 vote will be close. Kirk has criticized Seals for calling for a universal health care to provide for uninsured Americans.

"I don't think we should have the government take over everyone's health care," said Kirk, of Highland Park.

He supports a plan to let small businesses band together and get reduced insurance rates. He says most of the uninsured are relatively young employees working for small businesses.

Seals agrees businesses should be able to pool resources, but says a universal health care system doesn't have to be one run completely by the government, just supported by it. "There is no perfect solution," said Seals, of Wilmette. "We want to look for a better solution."

As some in Congress touted Medicare Part D as a solution for providing low-cost prescription drugs for seniors, Seals said that system has been too tough for the elderly to understand.

"The system is too complicated," he said.

Kirk voted for the plan and argues it's good for seniors to have lots of options under Medicare Part D, so they can shop around if they choose.

On medical malpractice reform, both candidates say high insurance rates for doctors are causing them to leave Illinois for states where it's less expensive to practice.

Last year, state lawmakers tried to address the issue by capping the damages victims of malpractice could receive. However, laws vary state to state, and federal legislation could standardize rates.

Kirk wants to cap damages nationally. "What you're looking for is to bring some predictability into the system," he said.

Seals says that won't work, and is proposing insurance reform that rewards doctors with clean records with lower insurance rates.

"There seems to be something else going on here," he said. "You'd have to show me caps work."

Health care was a subject on which the candidates traded jabs at their only public debate last week. With less than a week left in the campaign, Seals pulled out of an invitation-only joint appearance with Kirk Tuesday.