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GOP Loughlin launches bid to unseat Kennedy

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By Katherine Gregg

Journal State House Bureau

LINCOLN — John J. Loughlin II, a three-term state representative from Tiverton, has formally launched his Republican bid to unseat the only remaining member of the storied Kennedy clan in national elective office.

Though he has been raising money for months, Loughlin, 50, officially entered the race against U.S. Rep. Patrick J. Kennedy, an eight-term Democrat representing the First District, with an announcement Thursday morning outside the office park where his Lincoln grade school used to be.

Touting himself as a “new voice for Rhode Island,” Loughlin denounced Kennedy as “a guy who is out of touch,” who is vulnerable to the same “sentiments” of voter-dissatisfaction that carried Republican Scott Brown to victory in Massachusetts last month, in a contest for the U.S. Senate seat that Kennedy’s father — the late Ted Kennedy — held for nearly five decades.

“People are tired of government not being responsive, of government not listening,” Loughlin, who describes himself as both a fiscal and social conservative, told a small, but enthusiastic group of supporters. On abortion, for example, Loughlin said he is “pro-life.” A retired lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army Reserve, he said, he sees no reason to repeal the military’s “don’t ask-don’t tell” policy for gay servicemen because “service in the military is about defending our country ... it is not necessarily about open sexuality of any kind.”

He leveled this broadside at the Democrats controlling Congress: “In Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s world, there is no problem that can’t be solved by more government. But Washington today is not the solution, it’s part of the problem ... Our national debt is an unthinkable \$12 trillion. ... and the president’s new budget forecasts trillion-dollar deficits as far as the eye can see.”

“And what,” he asks, “has all [this] spending gotten the people of Rhode Island? Nothing. Not one job.”

“When we should have been focused on jobs, Congressman [Patrick Kennedy](#) was voting for a massive government takeover of our health-care system that would have raised taxes, increased spending and cut Medicare for our seniors,” he said.

“When we should have been focused on jobs, my opponent was voting for a cap-and-trade energy tax that would impose huge new costs on businesses and families in this state. Instead of extending a helping hand, my opponent has teamed up with Nancy Pelosi and her friends in Washington to throw us one anchor after another, making matters worse, not better.”

Loughlin later acknowledged that jobs and access to health care are inextricably linked. But, “we’ve got to address the cost, and we’ve got to address the competitiveness, and you don’t do that by taking over the entire health-care system,” he said. His prescription: “meaningful tort reform to drive down the cost of health care ... then we can find a constitutional mechanism to get competition across state lines, to be able to use the free-market to drive down the cost.”

Asked how he would help those without health insurance in the interim, he said: “You could have subsidy programs. You could have catastrophic policies. There are any number of ways you can do that without nationalizing the health-care system.”

Loughlin is already the best-financed challenger Kennedy has faced since 2004, when Kennedy defeated Republican Dave Rogers with almost 60 percent of the vote.

But Kennedy raised almost \$756,000 last year to campaign for a ninth term — roughly triple what Loughlin raised. And Kennedy had more than four times as much campaign cash on hand. Loughlin ended the year with about \$110,000 in his campaign war chest.

On Thursday, Loughlin said any “serious challenger” would have to raise and spend at least \$1.2 million against Kennedy, who spent \$1.79 million on his 2008 reelection campaign, in which he faced two candidates whose campaigns were too poor to require federal reports.

But Loughlin acknowledged he has not yet persuaded the national GOP to pour money into his race. “If you are the [National Republican Congressional Committee] and you are running congressional races across the country ... You are not necessarily going to go after Patrick Kennedy. You are going to put your resources where you think they are going to do the most good.”

“We are going to have to surprise them all down there, and it will be fun to walk into the NRCC on Nov. 3 and go nanny nanny boo boo.”

In his first stump speech, Loughlin ticked off his views: “The best social program is a good job that pays a decent wage ... Money and resources are best used when they remain in the hands of the people.”

Talking at length about his 26-year military career, Loughlin, who now runs Media-Rite, a television, radio and film production company, said: “We must treat our adversary for what they are — not as ordinary criminals, but as enemies in wartime. That means military justice,” he said, “not civilian court trials where they are granted the right to remain silent and the right through the legal process to obtain sensitive information.”

His announcement coincided with the release of a Channel 12 poll that found 59 percent of those surveyed said they would vote to replace Kennedy (28 percent) or at least consider another candidate (31 percent). Only 35 percent said they’d vote to reelect him. Loughlin was not mentioned in the poll conducted between Jan. 27 and 31.

Loughlin may not be Kennedy’s only challenger. State Rep. Jon D. Brien, a Woonsocket Democrat from the party’s conservative wing, has raised the possibility of challenging Kennedy in a Democratic primary next September.

With reports from Steve Peoples

John J. Loughlin II, 50

RESIDENCE: Tiverton

OFFICE SOUGHT: Republican candidate for First District Congressional seat

CURRENT OFFICE: State representative for Little Compton, Portsmouth and Tiverton

EXPERIENCE: U.S. Army National Guard, 22 years; U.S. Army Reserve, 4 years (Retired)

EDUCATION: University of the State of New York

FAMILY: Married to Susan J. Loughlin; two daughters, Carrie, 10, and Victoria, 21