

off the lip

Carb counting on the campaign trail

DAVID CICILLINE, 48

Mayor of Providence

After eight years as a state representative followed by eight years as mayor of Providence, David Cicilline has learned "there ain't no easy way out." Borrowing Johnny Cash's manifesto of tenacity as his campaign theme song, the experienced politician proclaims, "I will stand my ground and I won't back down." Which is why the Providence native believes he's the best person to voice the concerns of voters in northern and eastern Rhode Island on the federal level. Recently endorsed by the Rhode Island Democratic Party, the Brown and Georgetown University alumnus is campaigning for the 1st Congressional District seat currently held by Rep. Patrick J. Kennedy, D-R.I., who is not seeking re-election. But first he must win the nomination over other Democratic candidates Bill Lynch, David Segal and Anthony Gemma during the Sept. 14 primary. Though busy campaigning all summer, the avid exerciser and music lover hopes to make time to find out why Steve Martin is headlining Friday night at the Newport Folk Festival. **BY BRE EATON**

What do you think was your greatest accomplishment as mayor and how will that experience help you if you're elected for Congress?

Restoring honesty and integrity to the government and breaking the connection between money and politics in the city.

Is there anything that you would do differently, if you could go back to January 2003, when your first term as mayor began?

I probably would have had more conversations with Providence Firefighters Local 799 before the election because I think their expectations about what would happen after my election were unrealistic. I probably should've spent more time with them so that they would understand what they were expecting was not affordable and reasonable. When I took office, there were 10 years of unresolved contracts with Local 799, and I'm pleased that I'm leaving having completed all of those contracts and have current contracts for all of my employees. I wanted to have it done because the men and women of the department deserve to have a contract, and the taxpayers, the city, deserved to have a contract. I didn't want to leave that responsibility to my successor.

You've been out campaigning all day every day and will be for months to come. Have you been able to enjoy summer at all?

I love campaigning! I enjoy this every single day. First of all, it's a really great opportunity to meet people. This is the time in the history of our state and country where people are really engaged in the election. They're paying really careful attention. They have very strong ideas about what they think we need to be doing as a country. They have suggestions. They are reading the newspaper and the materials they get; they're watching it on TV. I think that's really good for our democracy and our state. It makes campaigning that much more significant because people are really wanting to talk about important issues and things that are important in their lives.

Will you make time to attend the Newport Folk Festival? See Steve Martin play the banjo? I didn't even know he played!

I didn't either! I saw he's headlining, and I

thought 'What is Steve Martin doing at the folk festival?'

What kinds of music do you have on your iPod?

I have very eclectic taste in music — from Drake to Bruce Springsteen to Lady Gaga to Michael Bublé. I also have Andrea Bocelli.

Do you have a campaign theme song?

We had a campaign song on the night of the convention. Johnny Cash, "I Won't Back Down." It's the idea of not backing down and fighting for people.

Did it get you pumped?

It's a great song.

If you're elected, what are two main issues you will address?

Job creation and infrastructure, that's going to be two of the important issues. We have the fourth-highest unemployment rate in the country. How can Congress create additional employment opportunities? How do we bring resources to leverage the economic development that's occurring here now to increase job growth? The second area is infrastructure investment to help rebuild our bridges, roads, water systems, tech infrastructure. Both as a way to create jobs quickly, but also as a platform for rebuilding the economy in the 21st century so we can move goods and services in the global economy.

You are the first openly gay mayor of a state capital. How did your decision to be open about your sexual orientation affect your political career?

I was very fortunate to have a very loving and supportive family and a good community of friends. So for me, it was pretty easy compared to what many people go through. There are awful stories of people who are rejected by their families and thrown out of their homes, fired from their jobs, terrible things. I was very fortunate, and I hope that one day we'll live in a world in which it's not newsworthy that someone is gay or lesbian just like it's not newsworthy that someone is straight. We're not there yet, but I think it's becoming more and more irrelevant. It's generational. Young people — they're coming out very young. The



He won't back down. Providence Mayor David Cicilline is hitting the campaign trail hard, hoping to take his local experience to create broad and influential, change in Congress. PHOTO BY JACQUELINE MARQUE

more people are honest about who they are, the more quickly we'll get to that place of being free from discrimination of any kind based on sexual orientation.

What social justice issues will you confront if elected to Congress? Is marriage equality a pressing issue?

I think it's an important issue because marriage is such an important institution in contemporary American society and access to that institution has extraordinary significance. The idea that some Americans are denied access to this institution solely because of their sexual orientation is wrong. I think marriage equality is important, not only because it will provide access to this important American institution, but because it's an important statement about our willingness to stand up and eliminate discrimination against gay and lesbian people.

What do you do to handle stress?

I work out every day except Sunday. So I run, lift weights and ride my bike to relieve stress. If I miss my workout, I'm like grrrrrrr. So I'm pretty serious about my workout. Because I love to eat, if I didn't work out, I'd weigh 400 pounds.

What's your favorite thing to eat?

Pasta. I don't get to have it as much as I'd like to because there's a lot of carbohydrates, but I love pasta.

Do you give yourself a reward for your hard work each day?

Ice cream, candy, gummy bears, chocolate. My biggest weakness is sweets. I eat candy and sweets all day. All the good healthy eating I do is completely undone by my sweet tooth.

Is there anything you haven't done that you'd like to do when you have more time?

I'd love to travel more. I love going to places I've never been before and I used to travel more than I do now because of my current job but I love traveling, learning about other parts of the world.

Where would you choose to escape to if you could?

A beach. Probably Southern Italy, like Portofino or Santa Margherita. It's beautiful.

And more pasta.

Yes. (*Laughs.*) Exactly!