

https://pressofatlanticcity.com/news/local/govt-and-politics/fixing-atlantic-city-infrastructure-a-hot-topic-at-2nd-district-debates/article_e00f6152-27b0-11ec-8a72-539e3946abdc.html

FEATURED

Fixing Atlantic City infrastructure a hot topic at 2nd District debates

John Russo , Michelle Brunetti Post
Oct 9, 2021



A mix of sun and clouds greets the welcome to Atlantic City Boardwalk sign on Jackson Avenue.

Joe Martucci

John Russo , Michelle Brunetti Post

If there was something on which all six local legislative candidates could agree Wednesday night, it was how to better access and enjoy Atlantic City should a federal infrastructure bill become law.

Stockton University hosted the 2nd Legislative District debates at the school's Atlantic City campus. The 2nd District encompasses most of Atlantic County, including the resort.

The Senate candidates are Republican former Assemblyman and Sen.-select Vincent Polistina, of Egg Harbor Township, and Democratic Assemblyman Vincent Mazzeo, of Northfield.

The four Assembly candidates are incumbent Democrat John Armato and Democratic county Commissioner Caren Fitzpatrick; and Republicans former Atlantic City Mayor Don Guardian and attorney Claire Swift, of Margate.

The U.S. Senate in August approved a \$1.2 trillion infrastructure bill that would go toward rebuilding the nation's deteriorating roads and bridges, improve broadband and help fight climate change. The measure still needs to be passed by the House of Representatives.

During the debate, candidates found some points of agreement. Locally, the improvements that could be made all seem to directly and indirectly impact Atlantic City.



Candidates for lt. gov. spar in debate, welcome Biden to NJ

Armato said the local highway systems, bridges and railways all need to be addressed.

“Rail is vitally important to get patrons and visitors from point A to point B into Atlantic City,” Armato said. “So all of these are very important. You take them as a whole. I look forward to the infrastructure bill passing in D.C., and I look forward to the jobs they will create in Atlantic County.”

The candidates also agreed on the need to fight sea-level rise and dredge more often to keep channels open for boaters to have safer access to waterways.

“I am all for using renewables, I have solar panels at my house and office,” Swift said. “We need to work with state, federal and local agencies. And we need to dredge.”

Armato agreed.

“Being a grandfather and great-grandfather ... solar and wind are vitally important,” Armato said. “The infrastructure bill money should be available for dredging.”



How tidal flooding is impacting students, caretakers and education in Atlantic City

During the Senate debate, Polistina stressed the need for dredging when asked how federal infrastructure dollars should be spent, but Mazzeo focused on other things.

“Gardner’s Basin is a jewel of the East Coast. We have to redevelop that,” Polistina said. He also stressed dredging as a way of combating rising waters, saying so much silt has built up in back bays it is forcing water higher.

In addition to spending on roads and bridges, Mazzeo said he’d like to see federal money spent to rebuild the Atlantic City Boardwalk.

“Boardwalks are a lot of cost to the municipalities up and down the seashore. To fix Atlantic City Boardwalk correctly, it’s probably somewhere between \$60 (million) and \$70 million,” he said.

In January 2019, then-Atlantic City Mayor Frank Gilliam said costs to repair the Boardwalk could be as high as \$50 million, citing construction vehicles being allowed to drive on the boards as greatly deteriorating their integrity. The city responded to that issue by restricting vehicle access to emergency vehicles and by installing concrete barriers.

Swift described the Atlantic City Boardwalk as “dirty, unsafe, there’s homeless people up there.”



Monmouth poll finds climate change on par with racial issues, jobs as top priorities

“It’s our bread and butter and what people come up here for,” she said.

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act was passed Aug. 13 by the U.S. Senate. The legislation would provide an estimated \$12.31 billion in transportation funding for New Jersey over the next five years. The state would also receive a minimum \$100 million to expand broadband internet access.

U.S. Sens. Cory Booker and Bob Menendez, both D-N.J., in August broke down the plans for the \$12.31 billion — \$6,883,719,399 would go toward highways and roads; \$1,146,780,115 would go toward bridges; \$104,373,268 would go toward electric vehicles; \$24,407,410 would go toward ferry service; and \$4,154,648,806 would go toward transit.

Some other local projects that are being planned or considered for infrastructure funds: Repairs to the gear boxes for the Dorset Avenue bridge in Ventnor, electric school buses and improving the Department of Veterans Affairs’ medical infrastructure.

State Sen. Michael Testa, R-Cape May, Cumberland, Atlantic, in June suggested finishing Route 55, which runs 40.5 miles south from Route 42 in Gloucester County to Route 47 in Port Elizabeth near Millville, but was originally planned to end on Route 9 in Cape May Court House. But U.S. Rep. Jeff Van Drew, R-2nd, said the project isn’t shovel-ready, so he couldn’t include it on his list of projects to propose for funding.

Contact John Russo: 609-272-7184

jrusso@pressofac.com

Twitter: @ACPress_Russo