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Ayotte and Hassan spar at forum; Nashua Rotary hosts candidates for Senate

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NASHUA – The race for U.S. Senate came to Nashua on Monday with incumbent Kelly Ayotte and challenger Gov. Maggie Hassan speaking at the Nashua Rotary Club.

Though the Rotary lunch did not allow for the candidates to interact in a debate-type confrontation, Hassan, a Newfields Democrat, used her time to imply Ayotte, a Nashua Republican, was in the pocket of special interests. Ayotte, meanwhile, also pushed back against Hassan's campaign ads.

Calling the ads "false," Ayotte said one implies she wants to cut the social program Medicare.

"My mother is on Medicare," Ayotte said. "Do you think I'm going to do something to harm my mother?"

Ayotte said she supports keeping promises to seniors, while looking for ways to strengthen programs like Medicare and Social Security so that those programs will be there for future generations.

Hassan, going first, laid out her objectives in running for senate, hitting topics like the opioid addiction crisis, tax cuts for the middle class and strengthening the economy. She said things are not getting done in the current "dysfunctional" senate.

"One that's run by special interests," Hassan said.

Hassan's first order of business is to push for the \$600 million in emergency funding, proposed by fellow U.S. Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, to help fight the opioid crisis. Ayotte, who helped pass the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act, also supports the emergency funding.

Hassan said she will cut red tape for businesses in order to promote job growth, fight for a \$12-an-hour minimum wage, and work to get families an additional \$1,000 tax break.

"I want to break down the barriers that hold middle-class families back," Hassan said.

During her allotted time, Ayotte spoke passionately about the opioid crisis that has hit New Hampshire and other states. She served as the New Hampshire Attorney General and worked on

fighting drugs, but the crisis here has ballooned in recent years, with more than 400 overdose deaths in the Granite State last year.

“I’ve never seen anything like this,” Ayotte said.

Ayotte wants to see the funding come to help with education, prevention and recovery, but she also wants to lead a push against the cartels in Mexico that bring drugs into the country.

“It’s coming over our southern borders,” she added.

When asked about immigration, Ayotte voiced support for a reform of the immigration system, making it easier for educated, hard-working people to come to the U.S. legally, while at the same time making it easier to enforce the immigration laws, track people who are in the country illegally and secure the borders.

“We’re a country of immigrants, but we’re also a country of laws,” she said. “We can do both.”

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