

Medical Student Congressional Candidate: Q&A with Stanford Tran

ADAM E. M. ELTORAI, MD'16

Q. You are taking time from away from your studies at the Alpert Medical School to run for the 1st Congressional District of Rhode Island. Can you briefly tell me about your background?

A. I guess I should start with my parents. They are South Vietnamese who fled the Communist regime after Saigon fell and came to American in 1975 as political refugees. Being born in this country is the most fortunate event in my life. I attend Stanford University on scholarship where I graduated with a degree in biology and a minor in physics. I spent the next year teaching high school in rural Arizona, where I saw firsthand many of the problems that bog down our children's educational success.

In 2011, I started at the Warren Alpert Medical School. Back then, I neither knew nor cared much about politics. I came to medical school because I wanted to help people, but soon I realized that where the most needed to be done wasn't in scientific advances, but in addressing the systemic social problems that prevent patients from receiving the standard of care. I was president of the student AMA chapter where I tried to further these ideas, but I realized that the audience I should be educating is the general public, not other doctors who are already well aware of the issues.

Q. Why did you decide to run for Congress?

A: I realized that a patient's health was determined more by their access to care and living conditions than which doctor they saw. The field of medicine is focused more on basic science than on the structural problems in the way in which care is delivered. If a patient cannot afford care or their medication, then it doesn't matter how well their doctor is trained. I wanted to be a doctor to help people, and the best way for me to do that is by working to change the systemic problems that affect public health. This campaign is about lowering the cost of healthcare and improving the way it is delivered.

Q: What are your thoughts on the current state and future of healthcare?

A: The biggest problem facing the nation's healthcare system before the Affordable Care Act was that costs were too high.

Costs haven't changed with the ACA. We pay the most of any nation for healthcare, and yet we have some of the worst outcomes. This needs to change. The pharmaceutical industry's lobbying power has wreaked havoc on our ability to control costs – we are not allowed to import prescription drugs from Canada (many of which are actually made in the US), and when Medicare Part D was passed during the Bush Administration, part of the law stated that Medicare was not allowed to negotiate prescription drug prices with the companies, and must pay whatever they charge.

On the other hand, Veterans Administration hospitals are not subject to this and pay about 50% less for prescription drugs. This is one of countless examples of how the healthcare industry has used its lobbying power to shape our nation's healthcare system to its liking. Hospitals should publish prices and outcome data in an attempt to bring transparency to hospitals and empower patients. In order to improve healthcare for the future, we need to reassess the way we deliver care and make our goal to lower the cost of care, not to maximize the bottom lines for health insurance and pharmaceutical companies.

Q: If elected, what are your primary goals and the reasons behind them?

A: My primary goal is to lower the cost of healthcare. Allowing patients to import prescription drugs is a simple concept to sell. We also need to mandate interoperability between EHRs – it is absolutely ridiculous that we are still printing, faxing, and scanning. In addition, we need to reform our tort system so doctors practice less-defensive medicine. Doctors should be not be liable for the rare poor outcome. This can be accomplished by having an independent panel determine if the doctor performed the standard of care, and if so, then a pool of money will be available for patient's compensation but the provider is not at fault.

Q: What makes you different from the other candidates?

A: I know I don't look like or sound like a politician, and I think that's a good thing – we need fresh faces, fresh ideas, and fresh approaches. The status quo has failed –



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Stanford Tran, 26, a medical student at Brown, is a candidate in the 1st Congressional District Republican primary to be held Sept. 9. The seat is now held by Democrat David Cicilline.

Congress has an approval rating less than 10% and bills are consistently based on partisan ideology and are brought to the floor with the sole intention of demonstrating ideological purity rather than solving problems and accomplishing things. My campaign is about devising and working to pass serious solutions that actually address the problems that the American people and the people of Rhode Island face. This campaign has consistently been defined by thinking differently. This campaign is about solving problems.

Q: Will you return to medicine?

A: Absolutely. My mother is very unhappy that I stepped out of medical school with only 6 months left, but politics is not a career and medicine is. I am running for Congress because I believe that the reasons I came to medical school, to help people and improve their health, require addressing these issues from a legislative standpoint. I want to practice medicine the way it should be practiced, where decisions are made by doctors and patients, not by pharmaceutical companies and health insurance companies. ❖

Disclosures

The author has no political or financial conflicts of interest.

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