

10th District incumbent facing strong challenger

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Republican Congressman Mark Kirk is a Naval intelligence officer and longtime congressional aide who says the key issues in the lakefront suburbs north of Chicago that he represents in the 10th district include cleaning up Lake Michigan, saving threatened VA hospitals and expanding Metra service.

"I live in this district. I grew up here," said Rep. Mark Kirk, (R)-10th District.

But Kirk is facing a surprisingly strong challenge from Democrat Dan Seals, a well-financed 35-year-old marketing director who is getting a lot of help from political heavyweights like senators Dick Durbin and Barack Obama in his first campaign for Congress.

Seals is running a TV ad and sending out mailers accusing Kirk of supporting the Bush administration on everything, including Iraq, and backing Speaker Dennis Hastert in the congressional page scandal. The issues, according to Seals, include health care for everyone, more accountability in Iraq and independence from the current administration.

"It all boils down to wanting a new direction. It can be the economy. It can be the war. It can be the Medicare Part D prescription drug plan. A lot of folks say we've got to be able to do better than what we've got now and that's a wonderful thing," said Dan Seals, (D)-10th District nominee.

Kirk is responding with TV ads that include testimonials from veterans and he is accusing Seals of distorting a record that he says is perfect for the district.

"I am the moderate, independent voice that can truly represent the needs of this district," said Kirk.

"He has not been able to be an independent voice for the district. He's voting 90 percent of the time with his party." said Seals. "He's never gotten his own bill out of committee, much less gotten anything passed into law. That does not speak to leadership."

The Seals campaign is extremely encouraged by an independent poll released Wednesday that has them within 2 points of Mark Kirk, even though Kirk is leading by 25 points in his own poll.

Kirk picked up the major newspaper endorsements and this is not a race that Democrats in Washington thought they had a chance of winning a few months ago. But the momentum may be changing, and Kirk, a three-term congressman who has had an air of invincibility over the years, seems to realize at this point that he is in the fight of his political life.