

Temperatures rise in 10th District debate
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Republican U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk and Democrat Dan Seals clashed on the war in Iraq, immigration and ethics in a heated exchange Thursday night during the only public debate the 10th Congressional District race will see.

As he has throughout his campaign, Seals hit Kirk early on his support of Bush's policies as well as their differences on immigration reform.

"I don't think you can build a 700-mile wall along a 2,100-mile border and think that's going to work," said Seals, of Wilmette, referring to Kirk's vote to erect a wall along the Mexican border to help prevent illegal immigration.

Kirk struck back, saying border security should be a chief concern and the wall was the best way to achieve it.

"I believe border security equals homeland security," said Kirk, a three-term congressman from Highland Park.

The two traded jabs throughout the evening in front of hundreds during the debate, sponsored by the League of Women Voters and held at Stevenson High School in Lincolnshire.

The candidates ran through a bevy of issues as they sometimes struggled to speak above the cheering or groaning crowd

The two differ on the war in Iraq with Kirk preferring troops stay there to finish installing democracy, while Seals thinks U.S. forces should leave in the next year and focus terror-fighting efforts elsewhere.

Seals has used several issues, including the war, to try to tie Kirk to Bush administration policies.

"I don't think Mark Kirk has been able to stand up to them," Seals said.

Kirk, though, has campaigned on his independence, offering his support for federally funded stem cell research as one example of his break from Bush's stances.

Kirk accused Seals of running a negative campaign and not knowing what's best for the district.

"In this election, I've been facing a negative campaigner," Kirk said, saying he's been

subject to “Chicago-style” attacks.

In his opening remarks, Seals hit Kirk on an e-mail that recently surfaced. It showed one of Kirk’s paid staffers sent an intimidating message to the president of Tel Aviv University, asking him to have a Seals supporter step down from his position on the school’s council.

The staff member suggested that Robert Schroyer’s support of Seals “can have a very bad effect on the University” and that “revenge is a dish best served cold.”

Kirk said he has reprimanded the staff member.

In other ethics issues, the two disagreed on using tax money to fund campaigns, with Kirk saying it would be an undue cost.

“Part of being a fiscal conservative is not authorizing a new federal spending program,” he said.

Seals has trailed Kirk in fundraising throughout the campaign and he said taxpayer-funded campaigns would weed out donations from donors that could cause ethical problems.

“I don’t think they should have that kind of influence on our membership,” he said.

The two also split on the death penalty, with Kirk for and Seals against, but the two agreed on their support for abortion rights and federal funding of stem cell research.

The candidates are scheduled to meet for their second and final joint appearance next week at the Waukegan City Club, an event that won’t be open to the public. But after the debate, it was unclear if both candidates were planning to attend.