

Dem Criticizes Kirk For Katrina Voting Record

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At the one-year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, 10th Dist. Congressional candidate, Democrat Dan Seals, questions why his opponent, U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk (R.-10th) did not support bills that would provide additional support to regions ravaged by Katrina and Hurricane Rita.

According to the Seals campaign, Kirk was not present to vote on HR 3894 that would have provided Section 8 housing relief to Mississippi and Louisiana area residents. Section 8 funding provides federal rental assistance to income-qualified individuals and families.

Kirk confirmed he was not present for the vote on HR 3894, but said he would have voted for it had he been present. "I would have supported the bill. It passed 418 to 0 and I would have been part of that majority," Kirk stated.

Regarding HR 4939 Supplemental Appropriations, the Seals campaign charged Kirk had been less than supportive of hurricane victims because he voted against providing an additional \$50 million for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for infrastructure improvements including the repair and replacement of city hall polling and voting equipment that the hurricanes damaged.

But Kirk explained that his vote really didn't have anything to do with FEMA. "I read every section of the bill," he explained. "The Hurricane Emergency Act would have permitted drilling in Alaska. I have a perfect voting record to protect Alaska."

Congressman Kirk said he was not against helping hurricane victims, but he was opposed to permitting drilling in Alaska. As such, he had to vote against the bill.

Seals continued to focus on hurricane relief as it relates to insurance company reimbursement of property losses.

"Slow payments and insurance disputes are jeopardizing the livelihoods of many families who suffered financial losses as a result of Katrina," Seals commented. "Without money from insurers to rebuild, homeowners are left with two choices: either to give up and leave, or rebuild by hand, tapping savings to pay for labor and materials."

Seals alluded to a family who had to relocate to Highland Park. The wife, Iris Morgan, is living in a town home in Highland Park while her husband is rebuilding their home in New Orleans. While Iris Morgan stated she would not leave Illinois, her husband, Sundance Morgan, has remained in New Orleans to reconstruct their home.

"While Iris lives in the rented townhouse here, her husband is drawing down on savings and relying on friends to finish repairs. Meanwhile, he lives in New Orleans in one of the thousands of trailers given by FEMA to Louisiana residents whose homes were lost or badly damaged by Katrina," Seals stated.

Seals said that ISO, an insurance industry modeling firm, estimated that Hurricane Katrina left \$24.3 billion in insured losses in Louisiana alone, but the state department of insurance said only \$12.5 billion has been paid out as of April.

According to Seals' reports, the insurance industry says it has paid out more than 90% of the claims, while consumer groups say that only a fraction of the actual damages have been covered, using numerous exclusions to reduce payouts.

Without money to repair homes, foreclosures could soon increase, Seals said. "If that happens, the recovery process will be further delayed, and the economic impact will be greater and spread beyond Louisiana and Mississippi."

Seals indicated that the federal government knew for three days that Hurricane Katrina was heading for a direct hit on Louisiana, and that New Orleans was vulnerable to catastrophic damage.

"It's a different story for property and casualty insurers. Despite the highest insured losses in history caused by Katrina, property and casualty insurers continue to make sizable profits and contribute to elected officials. The insurance industry had a \$43 billion profit in 2005, Seals reported, a 15-year high according to the Insurance Information Institute.

According to the Seals campaign, as of July 16, insurers contributed \$18.5 million to federal candidates, 66% of which went to Republican candidates. In the 2004 election, insurers contributed \$36.1 million, according to Seals. Kirk was one of the recipients, receiving \$165,000 in contributions from insurers, Seals contends.

The 10th Congressional Dist., which includes towns as far south as Glenview and as far north as Waukegan, also includes the communities of Mt. Prospect, Prospect Hts., Buffalo Grove and Arlington Hts. on the west.

The district is home to numerous Fortune 500 companies including Allstate Insurance.