

Pioneer Press  
November 2, 2006

Kirk, Seals face off in lone debate

By John Roszkowski  
Staff Writer

U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk and challenger Dan Seals sparred on a wide range of issues, including the war in Iraq, immigration, health care, the death penalty and other topics during the first and only 10<sup>th</sup> Congressional District public debate at Stevenson High School in Lincolnshire last week.

Huge crowds filled the school auditorium to see the debate as well as two overflow rooms with closed circuit televisions for people who couldn't fit in the auditorium.

Kirk, R-10th, of Highland Park, said he's been a moderate independent voice in Congress who has worked to secure funding for important local projects such as the double tracking of Metra's North Central line and the cleanup of the Waukegan Harbor and continues to push for funding for embryonic stem cell research at the federal level.

"Our election presents a choice for this district. I grew up here and I've lived in the district and my opponent does not," said Kirk.

Seals' home in Wilmette falls just outside of the 10th District boundaries but he's said he would move into the district if elected.

Seals told the audience he's running because there needs to be new leadership in Congress to change course in Iraq, provide health care for the uninsured and bring the federal budget deficit under control.

"As your congressman, I will be accountable. I will have face-to-face town hall meetings. At the end of the day, this election is about staying the course or changing course. I'm for change," said Seals.

Seals said the United States need to transition out of the war in Iraq. He said there needs to be more accountability for the Bush administration's handling of the war and believes Donald Rumsfeld should step down as Defense Secretary.

"On the other hand, I think the Iraqi government needs to know that this is not an open-ended commitment and there needs to be a timetable for withdrawal," he said.

Kirk said he supports a bi-partisan plan by former Secretary of State James

Baker and former Democratic congressman Lee Hamilton as a roadmap for peace and stability in Iraq.

"We are stuck right now between stay the course and an emerging strategy for defeat in the Middle East," Kirk said. "A total defeat of the U.S. makes us less secure."

Both candidates voiced support for some type of increased international economic sanctions against Iraq and North Korea over the development of their nuclear weapons programs. Kirk also said the United States needs to pledge to protect Israel in the event of a military attack from Iran.

On immigration, the candidates expressed differing views.

Seals said he supports "comprehensive immigration reform" endorsed by Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., which includes a guest worker program to give undocumented immigrants currently living in the United States a way to gain legal status should they pass criminal background checks and pay necessary taxes and penalties.

Seals also supports increased border security and tougher penalties for employers who hire illegal immigrants but opposes plans for a 700-mile wall along the U.S.-Mexican border.

"You can build a wall a mile high, but if there are jobs to be had, people will come," he said.

Kirk said he supports increased border security and believes building the wall is necessary to prevent many illegal immigrants from making the dangerous trek from Mexico to the United States.

"I believe border security means homeland security," said Kirk, adding that potential terrorists can enter the country illegally across unprotected borders.

The candidates also had differing opinions on the death penalty.

Seals said he doesn't think the death penalty works and is often unfairly applied to minorities and the poor. He supports a continuation of the death penalty moratorium in Illinois until the issue can be studied further.

Kirk voiced support for capital punishment. "I support the death penalty and if we ever get Osama bin Laden we should put him to death for causing the deaths of over 3,000 Americans," he said.

Both candidates said they support embryonic stem cell research and are pro-choice on abortion.

The candidates also weighed in on the congressional page scandal involving former U.S. Rep. Mark Foley, a Florida Republican, and other ethical issues facing Congress.

Kirk said he supports an ethics reform plan in Congress that would strip the pensions of any member convicted of felonies and would require House members to immediately report any credible allegations of misconduct involving congressional pages to the House Ethics Committee for investigation.

Seals, however, questioned the ethical standards of the current administration and Congress. He criticized Kirk, as House majority whip, for not asking House Speaker Dennis Hastert to step down from his leadership post for failing to investigate inappropriate e-mails that Foley sent to underage male pages.

"You don't need to have a plan, you need to have new people," said Seals. "That's how you get ethics in government."