

Gloves come off in 10th District debate

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LINCOLNSHIRE — Republican Congressman Mark Kirk and his Democratic challenger Dan Seals went on the attack this week at Adlai Stevenson High School in the biggest Lake County political event of the year and one of the biggest in decades.

Between 1,500 and 2,000 people turned out, said a League of Women Voters officer who helped organize the forum. It was the candidates' only open-to-the-public debate before the Nov. 7 election.

All 700 seats in Stevenson auditorium were occupied and spectators filled two overflow rooms and an open area called the Forum to watch the two-hour debate.

Kirk accused Seals of waging a “negative ... win-at-all-costs Chicago-style” campaign. He accused the challenger of supporting a “government-only” system “to take over your health care.” Seals “doesn’t want you to know there’s an FEC investigation of his campaign,” Kirk said.

Seals ripped Kirk, suggesting the incumbent is a lapdog of President Bush, saying the Sierra Club has withdrawn its support, asserting Kirk has been ineffective and suggesting he is in the pocket of big energy, pharmaceutical and insurance corporations.

Both candidates sparred over Israel. Seals noted a report that a Kirk staffer sent a “threatening” e-mail to the president of Tel Aviv University to pressure a prominent Seals supporter, Robert Schroyer, to back down. Kirk has said he reprimanded the aide.

Kirk said Seals, asked whose side he would be on if Iran attacked Israel, “said he would be on the side of peace.” Kirk said he “would be on the side of Israel.”

Unlike Seals, “I grew up here and I actually live in the district,” Kirk said, referring to Seals’ out-of-district home in Wilmette and his Chicago upbringing. Kirk lives in Highland Park and went to New Trier High School.

The Federal Election Commission investigation Kirk mentioned refers to a complaint made against Seals last August by Kenilworth Mayor Tolbert Chisum, New Trier Township GOP chairman. Tolbert said Seals failed to disclose a mailing from Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky, D-Evanston, on Seals' behalf last June as an "in-kind" contribution. Patrick Mogge, Seals' campaign manager, said the Seals campaign, not Schakowsky, paid for the stationery and mailing.

The two men spelled out different views on the Iraq war. Seals said the war is hurting the United States, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld should step down and, "We should transition out of Iraq in 2007."

Kirk, who has supported Bush in the war, said he will "back the Baker-Hamilton plan" for Iraq. Former Secretary of State James Baker and former Democratic Rep. Lee Hamilton of Indiana head the Iraq Study Group. The group will present Bush with options somewhere between "stay the course" and "cut and run."

Kirk took strong issue with Seals' assertion that he hadn't been effective, listing his accomplishments in Washington over the past six years.

Responding to Seals' assertion that he isn't a moderate, Kirk noted his breaks with Bush on key votes and that the National Journal, a conservative publication, ranks him in "the center" politically.