

Kirk Hit Hard on Staffer's E-mail

By Mary Ann Akers
Roll Call: Heard on the Hill

October 31, 2006

While it'll be voter turnout among women that clinches the deal in some districts and black voter turnout in others, it could be a get-out-the-Jewish-vote effort that makes or breaks the re-election prospects of Rep. Mark Kirk (R-Ill.).

The National Jewish Democratic Council is hammering Kirk for a controversy involving a Kirk staffer who reportedly sent an over-the-top political threat to the president of Tel Aviv University, telling him that he'd best rid the school's board of a supporter of Kirk's Democratic opponent, Dan Seals.

The aide reportedly warned that the board member's support of Seals "can have a very bad effect on the university" and that "revenge is a dish best served cold."

Well, that didn't sit so well with the NJDC, which is taking out a full-page ad this week in the Highland Park News, a Jewish community newspaper on Chicago's North Shore, highlighting the Kirk's staffer's threat.

"Mark Kirk Staffer Blackmails Tel Aviv University," blares the top of the ad, which is scheduled to run later this week. The ad features newspaper clips from the Chicago Sun-Times, which broke the story.

"A staffer for Rep. Mark Steven Kirk (R-Ill.), in a threatening e-mail, tried to get the president of Tel Aviv University to pressure a prominent supporter of Democrat Dan Seals to back down," one excerpt says.

The ad also includes a quote from the Seals supporter who sits on the school's board, saying he took the e-mail "as a threat in two ways," including that the university could be hurt because Kirk is

on the House Appropriations Committee.

The bottom of the newspaper ad, in bold letters, goes much further, seeking to tie Kirk to GOP corruption.

“Dennis Hastert, Tom DeLay, Jack Abramoff ... Mark Kirk? P.S. Kirk never fired the staffer. You’ve been paying her \$50,000 salary since she wrote this e-mail in JULY.”

NJDC spokesman David Goldenberg, noting that Kirk sits on the Appropriations subcommittee on foreign operations, told HOH that the Kirk staffer’s e-mail should have been “a firable offense.”

“It’s just another example of another corrupt Republican who wants to use his position to leverage his influence in a political campaign,” he said.

Kirk had nothing to say about the NJDC’s ad against him, but told HOH, “I was very upset when I became aware of the e-mail and its sentiment. That does not reflect my view. I reprimanded Ms. [Caryn] Garber and told her that if anything like this happened again, she would be dismissed.”

Kirk also noted that the Tel Aviv University board member in question, Bob Schroyer, has been a campaign contributor of his in the past. Kirk sent Schroyer a letter of apology. “I still support his philanthropic work and leadership on behalf of our alliance with Israel,” Kirk told HOH.