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Sen. Feingold Is An Independent Voice

by John Hmurovic

The first line of his official bio is a perfect summary of the political career of U.S. Senator Russ Feingold (D-Wisconsin), the keynote speaker at the October 23 Tenth Dems fundraiser. It reads: "Senator Russ Feingold is an independent voice for Wisconsin and the nation in the United States Senate."

It's hard to look at the record and argue about that. But if you need further proof, look at the variety of people who are looking with interest at a possible Feingold run for the White House in 2008.

Some liberal Democrats are interested. They like the fact that he was the only Senator to oppose President Bush's so-called "Patriot Act." At the time the Patriot Act was ratified, Feingold argued that we should be able to combat terrorism without undermining the privacy and civil liberties of law-abiding Americans. Many have since come around to agree that Feingold was the only Senator who got it right.

Liberals also like the fact that Feingold was an early opponent of the war in Iraq. Before the invasion, he argued that it would direct critical resources away from the fight against the forces that attacked us on September 11, 2001. As our military continues to be

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Join Us to Hear
U.S. Senator Feingold
Sunday, October 23
4:30 - 6:00 pm



www.tenthdems.org
Tenth News
OCTOBER 2005 Illinois Tenth Congressional District Democrats Newsletter Volume 2, Edition 10

U.S. Senator Feingold Will Be Keynote Speaker At Tenth Dems Event

by John Hmurovic

U.S. Senator Russ Feingold (D-Wisconsin) will be the keynote speaker at the annual Tenth Dems Fundraiser. Feingold is one of a handful of Democrats exploring a run for the Presidency in 2008. The fundraiser will be held on Sunday, October 23, 4:30-6:00 p.m. at the home of Marcus and Anne Wedner, 3 Kent Road, Winnetka.

Tickets for the event are now available at various price levels (\$1,000, \$500, \$250, \$100, & \$50 per person). If you are interested in attending you can call Tenth Dems at 847-266-VOTE (8683), or by e-mail at events@tenthdems.org. Call or write soon, because space is limited.

The Tenth Congressional District Democrats (Tenth Dems) is a grassroots political organization in its second year of existence. Its purpose is to help elect Democrats to all levels of government within the boundaries of the 10th Congressional District of Illinois.

In its first year, Tenth Dems recruited about 700 volunteers to help in local political races. Those volunteers walked door-to-door with candidates, stuffed envelopes, staffed phone banks, handed out literature at public places, helped set up candidate fundraisers, marched with candidates in parades and assisted candidates in numerous other ways. Tenth Dems also recruited new precinct workers and conducted training sessions for them and other newcomers to the political process, and provided them with information and support. The organization purchased and distributed

yard signs, political buttons, and designed and produced campaign literature for volunteers to take door-to-door. Tenth Dems also provided financial support for nearly three dozen candidates in 2004 and 2005 elections, donating over \$20,000 to their campaign efforts. And this is just a partial list of what Tenth Dems has done.

In between elections, Tenth Dems has been organizing forums for the people of the 10th District on some of the important issues facing the country, such as stem cell research and Social Security. It has also been actively recruiting Democratic candidates for Congress and other offices that will be on the ballot in 2006. It continues to reach voters through its monthly newsletter, as well as its website, www.tenthdems.org.

Tenth Dems is one of the most active and organized Democratic grassroots political organizations in the state of Illinois. Although it is a 100-percent volunteer organization, it still needs money to operate and to do its work. Much of that money comes from its annual fundraiser. Last year, Barack Obama was the keynote speaker at the Tenth Dems fundraiser, prior to his election to the U.S. Senate.



U.S. Senator Russ Feingold

Kirk Proposes Military Retirement Fund Cut

by George Rosenblit

Tenth District Republican Congressman Mark Kirk has always promoted himself as a friend of military veterans. But the September 2005 issue of NARFE, the publication of the National Active and Retired Federal Employees, reported that last year the House soundly defeated amendments to a budget procedure bill prepared by Kirk and Congressman Jeb Hensarling (R-Texas) that would have made both federal and military retirement funds vulnerable to the automatic cuts in any year spending caps were exceeded. Republican leaders did not promote these amendments, and former Appropriations Committee Chairman C.W. Bill Young (R-Florida) and his panel's subcommittee chairs opposed it. That's history.

Now let's have a look at the present. This year, Kirk has teamed up with House Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R-Texas), and a group of DeLay's colleagues, including Hensarling, who are reportedly drafting a new budget enforcement bill that would cap entitlement spending, including economic and health security promised to federal annuitants and military retirees, and still pass muster on a House vote. Medicaid, farm subsidies, food stamps and the Pension Benefits Corporation would also be vulnerable to cuts. So, all the publicity pictures Kirk takes with veterans in our area for local newspapers and his non-informative newsletter are just window dressing to make himself look good.

Meanwhile, Kirk doesn't communicate with us, his constituents, in an honest and meaningful way through public forums, or through "accountability sessions" that his predecessor Congressman John Porter frequently held. We are not being informed about important issues being considered by Congress on a continuing and timely basis. He's operating in a vacuum because he doesn't give us the opportunity to let him know about our concerns and to listen to his answers. Kirk is our representative in name only.

We haven't heard a peep out of him about Social Security solvency even though that subject was at the top of President Bush's agenda; about Bush's lies which got us into the Iraq war as evidenced by the "Downing Street Memo;" about the needless loss of over 1,900 patriotic American lives in an unwinnable Iraq war with no end in sight; about the removal of funding for levee re-enforcement in the New Orleans area in spite of past sound engineering recommendations by the U.S. Corps of Engineers (so Bush could provide funds for the Iraq war and tax cuts); about the grossly inadequate response to Hurricane Katrina in which many lives were needlessly lost; about the obvious observation that Homeland Security was not prepared to react quickly and decisively in an emergency situation. Why doesn't our government want an independent, blue ribbon, bipartisan, fact-finding commission to investigate and report on the Katrina problems and emergency response, and how to avoid problems in the future? Have you heard Kirk talk to us about any of this?

Kirk is obviously involved with his own agenda to further his career in Congress to the detriment of our feelings and needs in the 10th District; and our feelings extend beyond the geographic limits of our District to the needs of people less fortunate elsewhere.

With another election cycle just around the corner in November 2006, now is the time for all citizens in the 10th District to seriously consider the type of Congress we need and the type of representative we want in Congress. If you vote without knowledge of the issues, or don't vote, you may continue to get the type of government you really do not want.

Health Insurance Problems Are Getting Worse

by Mark Paul

While we focus our attention on the dual fiascos in Iraq and the Gulf Coast, there's another issue lurking in the background that won't go away: the employer-based health care insurance system is collapsing.

A few facts:

- The U.S. spends twice as much on health care per capita as any other country.
- The World Health Organization ranks the U.S. 37th in quality of health care in the world.
- More than 45 million people are uninsured.
- The death rate for someone without health insurance is 25 per cent higher than for someone with insurance.

Although the nation desperately needs to restructure health care, all we got from Republicans is a lousy senior prescription drug benefit, a deal so lucrative for pharmaceutical companies it's beyond Halliburton's wildest dreams.

Republicans claim to be the party of small business, yet they've made no attempt even to figure out how to help small businesses join massive groups so a single

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Where Exactly is That Line Between Church and State?

by Jane Goldenberg

We may not have learned much about new Chief Justice of the Supreme Court John Roberts during his confirmation hearings, but we got an earful from Senate Judiciary members who provided a good glimpse at the critical issues of our time, most particularly the wide divide among Americans on the role of religion in the public sphere.

As became clear from their rhetoric during the hearings, Republicans and Democrats don't agree about the importance of that line between church and state. The code we've developed to discuss our views on the First Amendment encompasses a wide set of issues. Most obvious is abortion, and questions about Roberts' view on *Roe v. Wade* – which Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pennsylvania) dubbed the “super-duper precedent” – abounded throughout the hearings. Then there was school prayer, the display of the Ten Commandments in government buildings, and the question of whether it is constitutional for schoolchildren to recite the phrase “under God” as a part of the Pledge of Allegiance.

Senators from both parties declared an interest in Roberts' views on religion and how they might influence his decisions on the Supreme Court. Yet, Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vermont), the minority leader on the Judiciary Committee, told the *Washington Post*, “Just as we're supposed to be colorblind, we should be religious-blind.”

If only it were that easy.

Our President himself declared in 2002, in response to the lawsuit over the “under God” phrase, “We need common-sense judges who understand that our rights were derived from God, and those are the kind of judges I intend to put on the bench.”

This question of how God and religion should interface with government policy was much on the minds of several senators.

Democratic senators, like Richard Durbin (D-Illinois), and Dianne Feinstein (D-California), expressed concern about Roberts' views on the separation between church and state.

Feinstein told Roberts, as if to remind him about the inviolability of the wall between church and state: “During the Roman Empire, the Middle Ages, the Reformation, and even today, millions of innocent people have been killed or tortured because of their religion.”

When she asked Roberts if he believed the separation between church and state was absolute, he replied, “Well, I don't know what you mean by absolute separation of church and state.” Roberts then proceeded to put on one of his full-court displays to avoid being pinned down by an actual opinion.

On the other side of the issue were the conservative Republicans on the committee, who spoke often of values and limited government, which Democrats see as code for their so-called faith-based initiatives.

Sen. Sam Brownback (R-Kansas) called *Roe v. Wade* “the (Supreme Court's) most notorious exercise of raw political power.” He then went on to say, “In a just and healthy society, both righteousness and justice travel together. Righteousness, the knowledge of right and wrong, good and evil, that's something that's written within our hearts. Justice is the application of that knowledge.”

If what Brownback meant by righteousness wasn't clear enough, his colleague, Sen. Tom Coburn (R-Oklahoma), couldn't have been clearer on the role religion should have in public life.

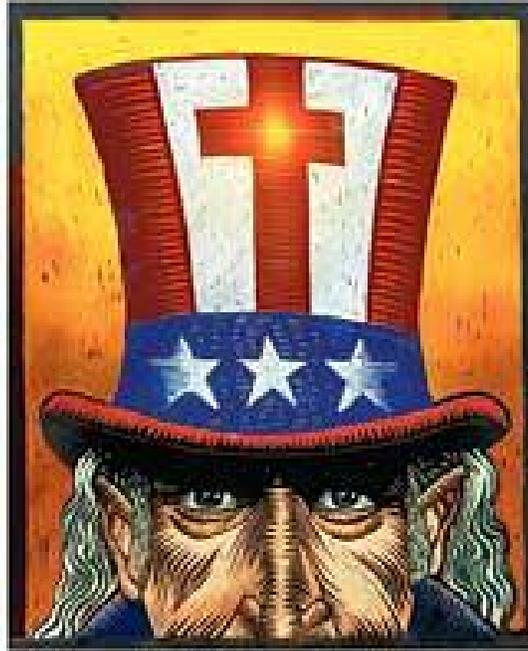
“Decades of judicial activism have created these huge rifts in the social fabric of our country,” Coburn said on the first day of

the hearings. “I believe the genius of our founders is that they recognized that individual rights were derived from a creator, not a king, not a court, not a legislature or a state. Our founders were concerned that, if our rights derived from the state or a court, they can be taken away by a state or a court. Our Constitution enshrines this idea and gives its meaning in the rule of law. That's why it's important for us to respect the words of that Constitution.”

In other words, if judges don't consider God's word as the informant of the Constitution, they lead our nation down the path to perdition. This type of sermonizing, paradoxically, seems to represent the kind of values the voters seem to appreciate from their politicians. As a new survey by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life found, only 29 percent of

the American people believe the Democratic Party is friendly toward religion.

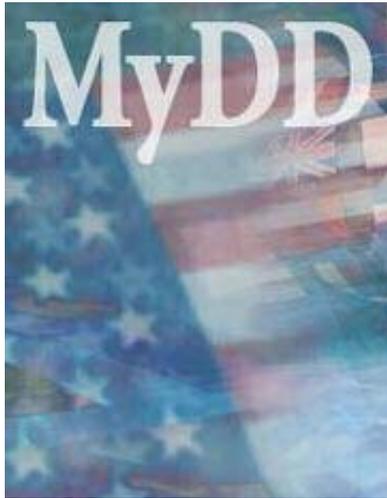
Whether Roberts as Chief Justice will act to maintain a distinct separation between church and state remains to be seen.



A (Partial) Guide to U.S. and 10th District Political Blogs

by Ross Nickow

Blogs, or Weblogs, in recent years have become as much a part of American culture as the I-Pod, Hummer, reality television or, in the lingo of George W. Bush, "the Internets." By definition, a Blog is a personal diary of thoughts, ideas, analyses or rants on any subject. Blogs can be found on a specific Internet site created by the author. And increasingly, the writers, or Bloggers, have created major ripples on the political landscape.



First appearing on the Internet in the mid-1990s, Blogs have grown to epic proportions in the last few years. Thousands of new Blogs appear daily, adding to the more than 17 million currently on the Internet. People who want to share their views and get feedback on any topic imaginable, finally have their opportunity. Anyone can start a Blog, and there are no limits to the subject matter: politics, film, health care, religion, weather, sports, education—it can be as specific or as general as its creator wants it to be. A Blog

can contain the writings of one person or a community of writers. Political Blogs can give voice to the voiceless and outraged.

One of the earliest examples of Blog-power occurred in late 1992 in the aftermath of Strom Thurmond's 100th birthday party. Then-U.S. Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott (R-Mississippi) praised Thurmond at the party, saying, "When Strom Thurmond ran for President (on the Dixiecrat ticket in 1948, promoting racial segregation), we voted for him. We're proud of it. And if the rest of the country had followed our lead, we wouldn't have had all these problems over all these years, either." Bloggers, led by Joshua Micah Marshall of TalkingPointsMemo.com, tied that praise to other quotes made by Lott that demonstrated his long history of racist public comments. The Bloggers kept the story alive, the mainstream media was shamed into following suit, and public pressure forced Lott to resign his position as Senate Majority Leader.

The Dan Rather debacle preceding the 2004 election helped to further bring Blogs to the forefront of American consciousness. Research by Bloggers challenged the validity of memoranda used in a report that Rather presented on 60 Minutes which discredited Bush's tenure in the National Guard. The focus on the memo's authenticity diverted attention from the truths in Rather's report. The mainstream media picked up on the information unearthed by the



Bloggers, and the Republican slime machine then went after Rather, who was embarrassed into an early retirement. The real story of Bush's pathetic National Guard record was thus buried.

Many national and local political Blogs are loaded with insightful analysis and commentary on the Administration's stranglehold on the country. For example, Arianna Huffington's Post (HuffingtonPost.com) attracts the best of political and comedic minds and provides news updates and links to other sites and news sources. Another Blog popular among Liberals and Progressives, The Daily Kos (DailyKos.com), the most viewed Blog online, also keeps tabs on Bush's assault on America and the world, and puts daily events in perspective. Many news reporters and commentators have their own Blogs, as do most personalities on Air America Radio. Most Blog sites contain links to other Blogs with similar perspectives of the political world.

The 10th Congressional District in Illinois has local Blogs created by residents. Ellen's Illinois Tenth Congressional District Blog (www.EllenOfTheTenth.blogspot.com) is the brainchild of Ellen Beth Gill. As a past webmaster for the Kerry/Edwards Illinois site, Gill decided to continue writing after the election and created her own Blog last February, commenting on both national and local issues daily. Gill feels Bloggers are essential to disseminating news, because, she said, "The conventional press is not doing its job...they spread Republican Party talking points, but do no independent investigation or analysis. They seem to be actively suppressing opposing points of view."

Another 10th District Blogger is James Rosen, whose "cranky" commentaries about the political state of the world make up TheDailyCurmudgeon.blogspot.com. Rosen says daily entries are a



"great outlet for your thoughts and help you become a better writer, researcher, pundit, political commentator and all-around rabble rouser." And Dem Ranter (aka Jim Gagne) recently started a new 10th District Blog, DeeplyBlue.blogspot.com. His frustration with the Bush administration was the incentive to start his Blog, allowing him to get things off his chest and help "to get the venom out."

DailyKos.com is one of several sites that allow visitors a chance to try their hand at Blogging, offering a daily diary that allows anyone the opportunity to post their thoughts without making a long-term commitment. But just visiting these and other political Blogs can provide a temporary antidote for the frustration of watching the

Bush Administration wreak havoc, and give perspective to the often biased and incomplete media coverage that passes for news.



SHINING STARS IN THE BLOGOSPHERE

Local & National Interest

EllenOfTheTenth.blogspot.com

TheDailyCurmudgeon.blogspot.com

DeeplyBlue.blogspot.com

National Interest

AmericaBlog.org

Atrios.blogspot.com (Eschaton)

CrooksAndLiars.com

DailyKos.com

DemocracyCellProject.net/blog

HuffingtonPost.com

JusticeForNone.com

MyDD.com

Prospect.org/weblog (Tapped)

TalkingPointsMemo.com

TalkLeft.com

ThinkProgress.org

TPMCafe.com

Wonkette.com

Xnerg.blogspot.com

(Skippy the Bush Kangaroo)

There are a number of interesting political blogs on the Internet, and every month Tenth Dems News will bring you some of those Voices From The Blogs. If you have a favorite blogger, or a blog entry that you particularly like, tell us about it at newsletter@tenthdems.org and we may include it in our next issue.

VOICES FROM THE BLOGS

Congressman Kirk Speaks, Sort Of

by James Rosen

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, a biblical scale disaster that leveled a large part of three states and displaced 1,000,000 people, hundreds of billions of dollars are being thrown around to re-build. As it has been widely reported no-bid contracts went out to the usual suspects and guaranteed "cost-plus" provisions were included so no matter what these supposed, "free market competitors/bastions of capitalism" are guaranteed a profit. Great deal if you can get it. And not just a buck or two more for a job well done. Count on record billions in profits.

But who exactly will be doing the actual heavy lifting? Who will clean up the fetid and festering Everest-sized mountains of garbage and debris? And who will pick up hammers and plywood (maybe steel reinforced concrete would be a good idea in building codes there like in Florida after they got leveled one too many times) to re-build their communities? People. Regular, humble, out of work, displaced, start from square one Gulf Coast victims of Katrina. And do they get guaranteed profits or no-bid contracts?

The suspension of the Davis-Bacon Act of 1931 (sounds yummy) by W, his first move after Katrina, is about allowing companies lining up for a piece of the \$200 or \$300 billion re-building money to cut the wages of the folks who are actually going to do the work. As Josh Marshall of TalkingPointsMemo.com wrote, "What sense does that make? It amounts to wage gouging. Bad values. And actually pretty bad macro-economics since as much as these disaster-stricken regions need roads rebuilt they need people who can take their families out to dinner and buy new clothes. And lower wages for folks involved in the reconstruction -- which is going to be a big slice of the population -- has a ripple effect across the board in those regions."

TalkingPointsMemo also suggested people call their representatives to find out where they stand. After a couple of phone messages I got Matt Towson, the press secretary for Congressman Mark Kirk (R-IL, 10th) to give me a "no comment" on Kirk's position on the suspension of the Act or the bill in Congress to suspend the suspension. The bill, H.R. 3763, has 186 co-sponsors, all Democrats. What a shock. There are rumors that some Republicans, deemed moderate, are circulating a letter for public release but as of yet no Republican co-sponsors of H.R. 3763.

I guess a moderate Republican is someone who claims to feel your pain but does nothing about it. Wonder if the Republicans are in favor of wage caps on CEOs of Halliburton, Fluor, Bechtel, SCI, Kenyon or anyone of a number of companies involved in Katrina re-construction? Guess the wind, rain and flood survivors and non-survivors of Katrina should have had better lobbyists and political connections. Maybe in the next life. And maybe members of Congress, like Rep. Kirk, could actually support the guy with no shoes, no hammer and no house who has to start over in New Orleans rather than the company that employs him. And by the way, "no comment" really is a comment. It speaks loud and clear.

P.S. If there is any chance I get audited because of this, I retract everything.

Read more from James Rosen at www.thedailycurmudgeon.blogspot.com



Left: Illinois State Comptroller Dan Hynes and State Sen. Jeff Schoenberg (D-Evanston) were among the panelists at a Tenth Dems Forum in Glenview on the issue of stem cell research. Center: Tenth Dems member



Ellen Gill (right) was among those from the area who traveled to Washington for an anti-war rally. Right: Tenth Dems member Dottie Palombo and intern Amanda Wall at a forum on the Supreme Court.

AtCenterNetwork Gives You Something To Think About

by Greg Mysko

Cindy Sheehan came to Highland Park and Deerfield in early September, but the Chicago television news cameras were elsewhere. But one man was there covering the events with his digital camcorder for later viewing on his website. Using a direct approach, he talks to right-wing opponents of Sheehan, and he talks to those on the left...and he lets them all speak without edited soundbite answers. That man is former 10th District Democratic Congressional candidate Lee Goodman, who started a new career of sorts as an independent news media journalist with his website AtCenterNetwork.com.

Goodman's media venture has three basic components. First is coverage of local activist events in the north suburbs and Chicago area. Many of these events are ignored by the mainstream news media even though they draw sizable crowds. "What you see on TV is only what goes on in downtown Chicago at the Daley Center or Federal Plaza," Goodman said. He hopes to encourage activists by giving TV coverage on the Internet.

The second mission of AtCenterNetwork is to provide in-depth interviews with candidates. "These are unbiased interviews. I ask fair and tough questions," Goodman said. "I try to give them time to talk and finish their thoughts." He said he does not edit their answers down into the familiar 12-second soundbite format used by TV news. Goodman is extending invitations to declared candidates for Congress, both Democratic and Republican. "I invited Mark Kirk for an interview, but I haven't heard back from him yet," he said. In the coming months, Goodman will include primary candidates for the State House and Senate. The current interviews available for viewing at AtCenterNetwork.com are with area Congressional candidates Zane Smith (10th District), Christine Cegelis (6th District) and Bill Scheurer (8th District).

The third component of the site is a blog based on Goodman's own video commentaries on current events, both local and national. Viewers are invited to add their own opinions and commentaries. "We should not be dependent on Washington-based pundits and should have discussions relevant to our own area," Goodman said.

The AtCenterNetwork site has received some national attention since it started in April. Goodman's interview with anti-abortion protesters in Libertyville drew many web hits and was linked to by other national blog and news sites. Another report on right-wing Republican protesters against Cindy Sheehan's recent visit to House Speaker Dennis



David Borris, of the North Suburban Peace Initiative, speaks to the crowd at an anti-war rally in Highland Park in September.

Hastert's office in Batavia also drew wide interest.

Goodman hopes that political discussion can be civil in this country. He feels that the Republican protesters in Batavia are an example of a new low point. At that event, a loud group of Republicans shouted down Cindy Sheehan, not allowing her to be heard. "So many of them were young. Within 20 years, they will be the leaders of the Republican Party," Goodman explained. "I hope Democrats don't stoop to that level. It's sad about what has happened to the Republicans here in Illinois."

Goodman says AtCenterNetwork fills a need not filled by the corporate-owned media outlets. He thinks there can also be potential with using local cable access to report on local events other than replays of city council and school board meetings.



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Things To Do, Places To Be!

These are events of interest during the month of October to those with an interest in politics. To find out more about them, as well as other political events in the month of October, go to www.tenthdems.org.

State Sen. Susan Garrett Discusses Issues Affecting Our Area

Sunday, October 2, 10:00 a.m.
North Suburban Synagogue Beth El
1175 Sheridan Road
Highland Park

Northfield Township Democrats Campaign Kick-Off

Sunday, October 2, 1:00 p.m.
Northbrook Civic Building
2002 Walters
Northbrook

Illinois ACLU Spokesman Discusses US Supreme Court Nominees

Sunday, October 9, 10:00 a.m.
North Suburban Synagogue Beth El
1175 Sheridan Road
Highland Park

Lake Board Members Bassi & Spielman Discuss County Issues

Sunday, October 16, 10:00 a.m.
North Suburban Synagogue Beth El
1175 Sheridan Road
Highland Park

Jesse Jackson & Pat Quinn at 8th District Power Sunday

Sunday, October 16, 4:00 p.m.
Lake County Federation of Teachers
Gurnee

Lake County Democratic Party 2006 Campaign Kick-Off

Wednesday, October 19, 7:00 p.m.
Flanagan's Restaurant
3201 Buckley Road
North Chicago

U.S. Senator Russ Feingold at Tenth Dems Fundraiser

Sunday, October 23, 4:30 p.m.
Private Residence
Winnetka

Renewing Our Relationship With Israel Discussion

Sunday, October 30, 10:00 a.m.
North Suburban Synagogue Beth El
1175 Sheridan Road
Highland Park

Social Security & Iraq Discussed . . . But Where Is Mark Kirk?



In Glencoe (photo on left), the 10th District Committee of Illinois United to Protect Social Security invited Congressman Mark Kirk to a discussion about the issue. They had a chair reserved for him in the packed house...he never showed up.

Meanwhile, in Deerfield, a group of area residents opposed to the war in Iraq joined Cindy Sheehan at Mark Kirk's office (photo on right), hoping to ask Kirk to support an end to the war in Iraq...he was not available to talk with them. Sheehan's son, a soldier, was killed in Iraq. She received national attention this summer for camping out in front of President Bush's Crawford, Texas ranch in an attempt to talk to him about the war.

Kirk, who was elected to represent our views in Congress, has held no public forums or meetings of any sort this year to listen to what residents of the 10th District have to say about the important issues facing our country.

Feingold, continued from page 1

bogged down in a war with no end in sight, and as terrorists continue to strike in Iraq and around the world, it appears he was right on that one, too.

Now, Feingold has stepped out on another limb by being the first Senator to call for a target date for our forces to withdraw from Iraq. A majority of Americans may not yet agree with him on that one, but every day it seems, more people are moving in that direction.

But it's not just liberals who are looking with interest at Feingold. His solid credentials as a deficit hawk are of interest to fiscally conservative Republicans who watch in horror as the Bush budget deficit grows deeper by the second. "Deficit Hawk," is the term that the Concord Coalition uses to recognize leaders in the fight to cut wasteful spending and reduce the nation's growing deficit. The grassroots, non-partisan organization has given Feingold its Deficit Hawk Award ten times. In the Senate, he is the lead author of Pay-As-You-Go legislation, which would enforce federal limits on campaign spending.

Feingold also has caused some liberals to scratch their heads in wonder after he voted to approve John Roberts as Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. Ralph Neas, of the liberal People for the American Way, was immediately critical of Feingold's vote, but Neas shouldn't be surprised. "He's absolutely extraordinary," Neas has said in the past about Feingold's independent nature, "an absolute

profile in courage."

Maybe the reason that Feingold is a true independent, is that his votes may represent the feelings of his constituents. Most Wisconsin residents, like most Americans, aren't hard-line liberals or hard-line conservatives; they just want a government that works efficiently and well. Feingold knows this because as a Senator he has traveled to every one of Wisconsin's 72 counties at least once a year, every year, just to listen to what residents have to say.

Russ Feingold is the man who re-wrote the federal campaign finance laws with Senator John McCain, the Arizona Republican who described Feingold as a man "who always does what his conscience dictates." The New York Times said it slightly differently when it called him "one of the Senate's leading mavericks." Feingold's official biography says he's an "effective legislator who works across party lines." That's an unusual characteristic for someone who may run for President in an era where the partisan divide in Washington has grown so wide. Some say his support for Roberts or his emphasis on deficit reduction may keep him from winning the Democratic nomination if he does enter the race. Some say his opposition to Bush's foreign policies could doom his candidacy in the general election against a Republican opponent. But before you lay down your money, take a closer look at Russ Feingold's record of stepping out on the limb. Betting against him could be hazardous to your financial health.

Insurance, continued from page 2

employee with a chronically sick child doesn't dramatically raise premiums for everyone else. And don't forget, in the 10th District small business includes prosperous lawyers, accountants, engineering consultants, etc. Every year, it seems the pain of soaring health care costs spreads step-by-step to households at higher income levels. Now it affects senior associates in Buffalo Grove, and it won't be long before partners in Winnetka begin wincing when the premium is due.

The distress also reaches into corporate executive suites. Sears, for instance, suffers twice, as it loses control over its real payroll costs, while health care costs keep digging into its market's buying power.

The health care industry has revenues in the trillions and the economics are nearly as complex and inscrutable as quantum physics. Building a universal system similar to those in every other modern country will require an enormous display of political will over several years. So my attention was piqued when I heard that Democracy for America, the organization left over from the Dean campaign, has organized a petition initiative to get this proposition on the November, 2006 ballot:

Shall the State of Illinois provide all state residents with full prescription benefits and the right to choose one's own doctors under a publicly financed comprehensive health insurance system?

And yet, Democrats can still snatch defeat from the jaws of victory if we don't avoid some electoral traps we tend to set for ourselves.

Universal health care as an anti-poverty program. This isn't Medicaid; it's more like Social Security. The new system will provide everyone the same standard of care the middle class expects while treating the poor with the same dignity as the middle class.

The often-irresistible lure of policy. Academics will continue to publish papers sketching out a new system because that's what they do, but this isn't the time to discuss funding and co-payments.

Universal health care as a Progressive pet issue. The petition language is clear, non-negotiable, and stands on its own. Gathering support from the Chamber of Commerce and even corporate CEOs isn't a sell-out, nor should supporters feel they're buying into other Progressive policies.

Universal health care is a centrist issue if we treat it like one. Let the Republicans defend the current system.

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