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*The opinions expressed are those of the writers, and not necessarily endorsed by Tenth Dems*



*Ebullient Dan Seals supporters join their candidate on February 5th to celebrate his primary victory. Tenth Dems look forward to coming together to help Dan Seals unseat Mark Kirk in November.*



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# Tenth News

MARCH 2008    Illinois Tenth Congressional District Democrats Newsletter    Volume 5, Edition 3

## Rep. Lou Lang Provides Lively Post-Primary Political Analysis

by Carol Hillsberg

Tuesday, February 5, 2008, was an amazing day for Democrats in Illinois in general and in the 10th Congressional District in particular. The record turnout in the Democratic primary election not only reflected the energy, enthusiasm, and involvement of local Democrats, but also evidenced a widespread rejection of the Republican Party. Lou Lang, Assistant Majority Leader of the Illinois House of Representatives, who has served in the Illinois House for twenty years, expanded on this theme on February 7, as he taught the Tenth Dems University course *Winners, Losers, and What's Ahead: A Post-Primary Analysis*.

In her introductory remarks, Lauren Beth Gash described Rep. Lang as the best extemporaneous House floor speaker she knew. Over the course of a lively hour, Rep. Lang lived up to this advance billing as he analyzed the political landscape nationally and in Springfield without once referring to any notes.

Regarding the contest between Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, Rep. Lang pointed out that both Democratic candidates are head and shoulders above the Republicans and that either will be an outstanding president. But Rep. Lang cautioned us against assuming victory. Although it is likely we will elect a Democratic president, he observed, this will not happen unless we continue to work hard. Noting that the population of his district in Lincolnwood, Skokie, and Rogers Park is the most diverse in Illinois, with many new citizens, Rep. Lang pointed out that it's important to involve all citizens by seizing upon their anger with the powers that be in Washington. As a self-described political pundit, Rep. Lang predicted that right-wing Republicans will realize that they need to nominate someone who has



*Rep. Lou Lang regales TDU students with his perspectives on the 2008 race to the White House for both Democrats and Republicans.*

a chance to win, and that person will be John McCain.

Rep. Lang emphasized that it's also crucial to elect Democrats to Congress. This means not only assuring Dan Seals's victory this time over Mark Kirk, he explained, but also increasing participation in politics by Democrats in other parts of Illinois, particularly downstate. In fact, Rep. Lang stated that he would like to clone the Tenth Dems and send us to every congressional district in Illinois.

Turning to Illinois state politics, Rep. Lang pointed out that Democrats have been doing well statewide. During the last statewide election, no Democratic incumbent in the Illinois Senate was defeated, and the only incumbent House Democrat who was defeated had been appointed previously, and not elected. This, Rep. Lang observed, bodes well for November. However, Rep. Lang's feelings about the Governor

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# Tenth Dems University Preview: Ron Miller to Discuss the Role of Religion in Politics

by John Hmurovic

Even before the final votes were counted in the 2004 presidential race, political pundits were saying that George W. Bush won his second term in the White House because of support from the religious right. Now, these pundits are wondering if the religious right will stay home in a race between John McCain and Hillary/Barack.

Like it or not, religion has become an important part of the political landscape in America. Most of that impact, however, has come from the religious right. Despite the fact that, at most, 25 percent of Americans can be called evangelicals, that group of conservative Christians is most talked about in discussions about politics in religion. They are seen as the group that has kept Mike Huckabee's campaign alive, and they are the group that every Republican is wondering about as Republicans assess their party's chances of keeping the White House.

But not all evangelicals are Republicans, and there are signs that the Republicans should not take any evangelical voter for granted. In Missouri, more than one-third of white voters who identified themselves as evangelicals or born-again Christians chose a Democratic ballot in the recent primary. There are indications that the traditional Republican rhetoric against gay rights and abortion isn't enough to satisfy all evangelicals. A growing number of these deeply religious Christians don't limit their concerns to just those two issues. Many also believe strongly in the Biblical emphasis on helping the poor and respecting the things that God has given us, including the environment on planet Earth. Dealing with those issues is something the Democratic Party has traditionally tackled and the Republican Party has traditionally fought.

With these changes in the air, what role will religion play in the 2008 election? That's a topic that Ron Miller will address at a Tenth Dems University class on Tuesday, March 4<sup>th</sup>.

Ron Miller is well-qualified to address the topic of religion in politics. He is the chair of the Religion Department at Lake Forest College. He



is the co-founder and co-director of Common Ground, which seeks interfaith dialogue as well as a better understanding of the world's cultural, religious and spiritual traditions. He is also a widely-respected author and lecturer on religion.

Among other things, he is expected to talk about the role of the religious right in the 2008 election. Will they come out in huge numbers to back John McCain? Will many of them shift to the Democratic side this year? How many of them, not thrilled with either option, will simply not vote in 2008? Meanwhile, are citizens with more liberal religious views sufficiently organized to act as an effective counterbalance to the religious right in 2008? What are the issues that will, and should, motivate those whose lives are deeply influenced by religion? In short, Prof. Miller will talk about what role religion will play in the 2008 presidential election.

Organized by the Tenth Congressional District Democrats, Tenth Dems U classes are open to all, at no cost. This one begins at 7 p.m. on March 4<sup>th</sup>, and will be held at the Northbrook Public Library, 1201 Cedar Lane, Northbrook. To find out more, and to register in advance, go to [www.TenthDemsU.org](http://www.TenthDemsU.org).

## Introducing Legislation to Recycle E-Waste

by State Sen. Susan Garrett

Electronic products are the fastest growing portion of the solid waste stream. In 2005, 2.6 million tons of electronic products became obsolete, yet only 13 percent of those products were recycled.

My new legislation, SB1583, requires the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) to manage the state collection, transportation, and recycling system for household electronic devices such as computers, printers, televisions, and cell phones. The bill makes manufacturers responsible for recycling and covering the costs of their products.

The IEPA will collect registration fees from electronics manufacturers, which will be deposited into an Electronics Recycling Fund. This fund will support the administration of the electronics recycling program. In addition, the legislation will act to effectively ban all electronic products in landfills over a period of time, while gradually increasing the statewide recycling or reuse goals for all covered electronic devices.

This program is win-win. Consumers will be able to safely recycle their electronics at no cost to them, and the State of Illinois will ensure that these items are recycled here and not shipped to third world countries.





# The Cost of Capital Punishment in Illinois

by Jennifer Bishop

Illinois has long been at the center of the national debate on the death penalty, and as a result there is an unusually high degree of consciousness about the death penalty as a political issue. Most people in Illinois know that the problem with legal error and wrongful convictions in the capital punishment system is serious. For the most part, Illinoisans know that the death penalty is applied to a disproportionate degree to the poor and disenfranchised, and even the mentally ill. And even if they are not persuaded by the moral, religious, and human rights proscriptions against killing, there are many who know that there may not be any way that human beings can create a legal system that can execute other human beings with "fairness and accuracy."

Illinois became prominent nationally on the issue of capital punishment when a series of events collided around the year 2000. When the Illinois list of death row exonerees – i.e., innocent people, wrongly convicted, many of whom spent a decade or more of their lives on death row – actually surpassed the number executed since 1976, the year the Supreme Court reinstated the death penalty, a pro-death penalty Republican governor became deeply troubled. He had come within 48 hours of executing an innocent man – Anthony Porter. He declared a moratorium on all executions, the first in the nation, while an independent blue-ribbon commission studied the system.

Simultaneously, the *Chicago Tribune* began Pulitzer Prize-winning investigations into the legal details of the many cases gone awry. The public began to hear about the staggering costs of lawsuits by the wrongfully convicted and the lengthy process required for any execution. And during that time, significant for me personally, new voices entered the debate – those of murder victims' family members who opposed the death penalty. Mine was one of those families. My sister, Nancy Bishop Langert, along with her husband Richard and their unborn child, was murdered in Winnetka in 1990. The killer, 16 at the time of the brutal crime, is serving three life without parole sentences in the Illinois Department of Corrections. My interest in this issue began when some Illinois politicians were inspired by their case to call for execution of juvenile offenders, a move I opposed, inspired by Nancy's last words of love. While most of the families of the victims of the 167 inmates on Illinois' death row in 2000 supported their executions in the hope of some sort of justice and closure, some of us spoke out, realizing that the death penalty only gave us endless years of appeals that focused attention and resources exclusively on the offender, almost forgetting the victims. Executions only would create more grieving families and turn us into killers, too. Ultimately closure is a myth in any case. To us, life without parole was the far preferable sentence.

The majority of the governor's commission was pro-death penalty at the start of the study. After hearing all the problems, however, they began to talk of abolition as the only real fix. But since they were charged with making reform recommendations, they did so. The governor repeatedly asked the legislature to enact these recommendations, but the legislature chose not to, caught in a troubled relationship with a governor under legal scrutiny himself.

After repeated attempts to enact reforms, and with his term coming to



an end, Governor George Ryan made history by commuting every inmate on death row to life without parole because it was clear by that time that the system was so unreliable that it would be almost impossible to determine which sentences were appropriate and which were not. I was there in the room at Northwestern Law School the day George Ryan made that historic announcement. Critics said Governor Ryan made the commutations to benefit himself politically. That is simply not true; if anything, the principled stand he took lost him what little support from his own party he had remaining. He commuted those sentences because it was the right thing to do.

Governor Rod Blagojevich has chosen to continue the moratorium, but it is really a moot point because no one now immediately faces execution. So, while the death penalty remains the law in the state, and prosecutors have continued to pursue it (there are now 13 new death row inmates in Illinois), the question of

what to do about it has been put on a back burner. But even in the last five years much has happened of importance on this life and death issue.

The legislature, under the leadership of then Democratic State Senators Barack Obama and John Cullerton, acted to implement some of the recommended reforms – mandatory videotaping of confessions, new and fairer line-up procedures, etc. The General Assembly created a Death Penalty Reform Study Commission to monitor those reforms. Just this month I was appointed by Governor Blagojevich to fill a vacancy on this commission. Led by former federal prosecutor and well-respected attorney Tom Sullivan, the commission struggles to continue its work under state budget cuts.

In recent years, many death penalty trials have not ended up as prosecutors had hoped, with juries giving life without parole. This includes some of the most infamous and heinous crimes in recent state history, such as the Brown's Chicken murders of seven people in Palatine. Retiring Cook County States Attorney Richard Devine tried the case personally and aggressively sought the death penalty. But with so many questions still in the public's mind, and with four of the seven victims' families in that case opposing the death penalty, even that jury was unwilling to give the sentence of death to a mass murderer who had eluded police for over a decade and a half.

The *Chicago Tribune* and many other leading religious, social, political, and academic voices in the state have been stating unequivocally in recent years that abolition of the death penalty is by far the best option. The Supreme Court in the last two years has abolished the death penalty for those under the age of 18 at the time of their offense, and for the mentally ill. Many in Illinois watched carefully just last month as New Jersey became the first state in the modern era to legislatively abolish the death penalty. This enormous step was made possible by victims' voices opposing the death penalty and prosecutors supporting life without parole as an alternative.

What would have previously been unthinkable is now common politically. Three of the six candidates vying in the recent Democratic primary for Cook County State's Attorney were openly anti-death penalty – Brewer, Brookins, and Suffredin. The winner, career prosecutor Anita Alvarez, has just called for a statewide referendum

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# Illinois Budget Woes Grow: Governor, General Assembly Face Huge Challenges, Financial and Political, to Overcome

by State Rep. Lou Lang

The Illinois state budget is deteriorating while Governor Rod Blagojevich's frayed relationship with the Illinois General Assembly shows no signs of improving, as both the administration and legislature attempt to hammer out next year's budget on the unhealed wounds of last year's fight.

The state is already struggling to pay its bills for the current budget. There is a backlog of nearly \$1 billion unpaid bills. Most vendors need to wait 30 days or more to get paid, and some wait 60 days.

And next year looks worse.

Last month, the Commission on Government Forecasting and Accountability, the General Assembly's financial forecasting arm, reported that state government tax revenue may fall \$600 million this budget year, blowing a huge hole in the current budget – before the state legislature must address a \$2 to \$3 billion shortfall in next year's budget.

The legislative commission said the current state budget counted on revenue growing by \$1.6 billion this budget year, mostly the result of natural economic growth. But the deflating economy is undermining that expected revenue growth, according to the new commission report. The commission will make an official projection on March 5<sup>th</sup>, but said it appears the state will be "struggling even to reach \$1 billion" in new money this fiscal year, which ends June 30<sup>th</sup>.

Money from the personal income tax, which had been one of the few bright spots in the state's economic picture this year, has slowed. Both the state sales tax and the corporate income tax have fallen short, too.

In addition to tax income, investment income is suffering significantly, too. Illinois Treasurer Alexi Giannoulias estimates the state likely will earn \$38 million to \$50 million less on its investment portfolio this year than last year and that earnings will drop even further next year. In the last budget year, Illinois generated \$426 million in investment income. Next year, the state will earn as little as \$243 million.

The dropping state revenue is reflected in the state's ability to pay its bills. The Illinois Comptroller's Office, which is responsible for paying the bills, not only reports a current backlog of \$1 billion of unpaid bills, it also estimates the situation will only worsen.

One short-term solution is to borrow money to pay back bills. House Minority Leader Tom Cross, R-Oswego, has urged the state to obtain a short-term loan, and I support the idea, too.

Although a short-term loan doesn't solve the larger budget problem, which is that the state allocates insufficient money to pay all of its healthcare costs, it would get money in the hands of vendors, like local pharmacists, hospitals, and doctors, who have already provided goods and services to the state.



Governor Blagojevich's office says it will consider the short-term loan idea. However, the governor wants the legislature to approve a supplemental budget bill that will capture federal Medicaid dollars to help pay the state's growing medical expenses.

Part of the reason for the state's increasing medical costs is the governor's unilateral and unauthorized expansion of healthcare services without money appropriated by the General Assembly to pay for the extra services, services which could add an additional \$450 million to \$1 billion in costs annually to the state budget.

The flagging economy is weakening the state budget, and the governor's reckless management of state finances is undermining it further. The General Assembly confronts enormous and painful challenges to patch the looming budget holes this year and next. To overcome those challenges, the legislature needs the governor to work seriously in Springfield as a responsible partner to balance, not unbalance, the budget.

## Post-Primary Analysis *continued from page 1*

of Illinois were less sanguine. In his opinion, Rod Blagojevich has not shown that he understands what it means to be a governor. In Rep. Lang's view, a governor's job is not to steal headlines from the legislature in Springfield; his job is not to promote petty jealousies and power grabs; and his job is not to disregard what the legislature passes and change it according to his whim. As an example, Rep. Lang criticized the governor's eleventh hour insertion into the transit bill of a provision for free rides for seniors. Rep. Lang said that he has many seniors in his district and that many of them expressed anger about the free rides. His constituents' feedback on the transit bill led Rep. Lang to conclude that no one — rich or poor — wants to be used as a political pawn. Rep. Lang said that he waited 30 years to elect a Democratic governor in Illinois and that all he wants is for this individual to be a good governor, not an embarrassment. He said that he supported Rod Blagojevich in 2006 and still believes that he could be that good governor. He feels that the Democratic majority in Springfield can move forward together, that there is consensus and common purpose among them. He said that we just need someone who can knit all the concerns together.

In response to questions on a wide range of other topics, Rep. Lang stated that he opposed recall of elected officials as it can lead to a dangerous tyranny of the majority. He also opposed an Illinois Constitutional Convention because he feared its becoming a platform for one-issue interest groups. Nor is he in favor of term limits for legislators, because a lawmaker would be gone just as he or she gained expertise in the complicated issues facing Illinois. In Rep. Lang's view, a legislature has an institutional memory, and experienced people are essential to drawing upon this resource. On this point, Rep. Karen May, who attended Rep. Lang's course, noted that inexperienced legislators are more susceptible to lobbyists.

Returning to the national scene, Rep. Lang sought to dissipate some of the mystery around superdelegates to the Democratic National Convention. He explained that certain elected officials automatically became superdelegates and that Michael Madigan, as chairman of the Illinois Democratic Party, appoints the rest of Illinois' superdelegates. In Rep. Lang's opinion, it is conceivable that, as in 1960, Democrats will arrive at the National Convention with no clear winner of the presidential nomination. Rep. Lang concluded that if this lack of inevitability energizes, enlightens, and educates, it could be a good thing for all of us.



# McCain and Kirk: Not Moderates

by Steve Sheffey

Finley Peter Dunne's Mr. Dooley observed at the turn of the last century that "a man expects to be illicted Prisdint iv th' United States, Hinnessy, f'r th' fine qualities that th' r-rest iv us use on'y to keep out iv th' pinitinchry." Yes, John McCain and Mark Kirk are pro-Israel. But that is the minimum we should expect from our elected officials; it is hardly sufficient, especially when their opponents are also pro-Israel.

John McCain is not a moderate unless the term "moderate" now includes someone who believes that "Roe v. Wade is a flawed decision that must be overturned."

John McCain is not a moderate unless the term "moderate" now includes someone who believes that "gun control is a proven failure in fighting crime," who "opposes holding gun manufacturers liable for crimes committed by third parties using a firearm," who "opposes restrictions on so-called 'assault rifles,'" and who believes "that banning ammunition is just another way to undermine Second Amendment rights."

These are not statements allegedly made by McCain's supporters that I heard fourth hand; nor are they taken out of context. They are there for all to see on McCain's own website. He's proud of these positions. They play well among Republicans. No surprise there, but what is surprising is that so many people think McCain is a "moderate."

John McCain is not a moderate unless the term "moderate" now includes someone who says that a candidate's Christian faith is "an important characteristic" for a president, that he would prefer a Christian president, and that the "Constitution established the United States of America as a Christian nation." You might expect such nonsense from Mike Huckabee, but these, too, are John McCain's own words.

To his credit, unlike Mike Huckabee, John McCain does seem to accept the fact of evolution, and unlike Mitt Romney, McCain does seem to say what he means. Maybe by GOP standards McCain is a moderate. But our country has swung dangerously to the right if McCain's views on reproductive freedom, gun control, and the role of religion in America can be considered mainstream.

Mark Kirk, another self-described Republican "moderate," endorsed John McCain early in McCain's candidacy. It's not clear if Kirk shares all of McCain's views on gun control, but when Kirk allowed the ban on assault weapons to lapse, his rationale for refusing to stand up to the gun lobby was "the NRA is more powerful than al-Qaeda." That's not my idea of independent, thoughtful leadership. Kirk has voted both ways on tort immunity for gun dealers and manufacturers, so it's not clear whether Kirk supports McCain on that issue.



I don't know if Kirk agrees with McCain's views on the role of Christianity, but I do know that in 2006, after a federal judge ruled that the cross could not stand in the municipal park because it violated a state constitutional prohibition on the governmental endorsement of any one religion, Kirk voted in favor of the federal government acquiring a 29-foot tall cross on Mt. Soledad, near San Diego. In December 2007, Kirk voted in favor of a House resolution acknowledging and supporting the "role played by Christianity in the founding of the United States." Kirk also voted for the Terry Schiavo

Act, which required the forcible insertion of a feeding tube into a woman who had been in a vegetative state for 15 years, against the wishes of her husband.

Oddly enough, the same people who expressed concerns about the views of some of Barack Obama's supporters have not called upon Kirk to denounce McCain's views on the role of religion in government; nor have they called upon John McCain to quit the Episcopal church because of its documented anti-Israel bias. They are right not to question

McCain's own religion but wrong not to question McCain's views on the role of religion in government.

It is likely that Kirk disagrees with McCain on reproductive choice, which illustrates another myth of Republican moderation. Yes, there are some Republicans, like Mark Kirk, who may hold "moderate" (read "Democratic") views on some issues. But they have no qualms about supporting people like John McCain, or former Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert, who have used and would use their positions of power to thwart the very agenda Kirk claims to support.

The week after Kirk was reelected in 2006, he voted to elect Rep. Darrell Issa (R-CA) to the post of Republican Policy Committee Chairman. Issa had previously referred to Israel as an "apartheid state" and called for the U.N. to redraw Israel's borders. Does Kirk agree with Issa on Israel? Doubtful. But he voted for him anyway (fortunately, Kirk's fellow Republicans rejected Issa by a 2-1 margin), and that vote is consistent with Kirk's efforts to put in positions of power other Republicans whose agenda is not ours.

Kirk may claim to have moderate positions, but he supports candidates — and a political party — whose agenda belies those positions. The single most important vote a Congressman casts is for Speaker of the House, and Kirk certainly will vote Republican (which most likely means Rep. John Boehner (R-OH)). That's not good if you care about reproductive choice, gun control, or separation of church and state. Our Republican friends are entitled to their own opinions, but not to their own facts, and the fact is that while the parties and the candidates might not differ on Israel, there are real differences on other issues that should concern all of us. Support for Israel is the minimum we should expect from our candidates — it does not excuse being wrong on so many other issues.

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## Tenth Dems Seeks Volunteers to Come to the Aid of Their Party by Adrienne Kirshbaum

As the winter weather warms, so will the political climate: Dick Durbin is up for reelection. Dan Seals is out to defeat Mark Kirk. And there's that little matter of a presidential race. Be part of all the excitement! Volunteer for Tenth Dems.

All skills are welcome. We especially need computer and Internet technology gurus to help administer our website, edit and develop

content, and design graphics. We also need help with networking and installing computers and other peripherals. Even if your computer skills end with Google, you can help us find articles and letters about our candidates and their opponents in online and print media. Or, if you're tired of talk, try writing for the *Tenth News*. Email [volunteers@tenthdems.org](mailto:volunteers@tenthdems.org), or call us at 847-266-VOTE (8683), and we'll get you started.

## Kirk Unmasked:

# Kirk Opposes Constitutional Checks and Balances

*This is the tenth in an ongoing series.*

On February 14th the House of Representatives sent a valentine to the people of the United States by authorizing contempt citations against presidential chief of staff Joshua B. Bolten and former White House counsel Harriet E. Miers for refusing to provide critical documents and testimony called for by subpoenas the House Judiciary Committee issued last year. Along with most other Republicans, Mark Kirk opposed this long-overdue resolution.

The Judiciary Committee issued the subpoenas last year as part of the congressional investigation into the role of the White House in the 2006 mass firings of federal prosecutors. Citing executive privilege, Ms. Miers and Mr. Bolten have refused to honor the subpoenas. Ms. Miers also refused to appear before the House Judiciary Committee at all, prompting the committee to authorize contempt citations back in July. Negotiations between congressional leaders and the White House to obtain the requested documents and testimony have gone nowhere.

"[D]espite duly issued subpoenas, the White House has determined that it has the unilateral authority to prevent Mr. Bolten from providing us with a single piece of paper and to prevent Ms. Miers from even showing up at a Committee hearing," said Rep. John Conyers, chair of the House Judiciary Committee.

The Valentine's Day House resolution asked the Justice Department to enforce the subpoenas and authorized House lawyers to initiate or intervene in judicial proceedings in federal court if the Justice Department does not act.

Those who supported the House measure to hold Mr. Bolten and Ms. Miers in contempt of Congress understood its significance: "If the executive branch can disregard congressional subpoenas in this way, we no longer have a system of checks and balances," said Rep.

Conyers. "That is the cornerstone of our democracy, and it is our bipartisan responsibility to protect it," he added.

Mark Kirk did not support this resolution.

The incumbent 10th District Congressman chose to protect the White House and its assault on democracy rather than our Constitution's system of checks and balances. The House approved the resolution 223 to 32, with Rep. Kirk voting "no" and most of his fellow Republicans not voting at all. Led by Republican Minority Leader John Boehner, more than 100 of them walked out of the House chamber before the roll call. In a photo that appeared on the front page of the February 15th *New York Times*, Kirk can be seen on the steps of the Capitol, shoulder to shoulder with his fellow Republicans.

Explaining why the contempt resolution was necessary, *The New York Times* editorial board wrote, "The stakes are high. There are people in jail today, including a former governor of Alabama, who have raised credible charges that they were put there for political reasons." The editorial concluded, "If Congress fails to enforce its own subpoenas, it would effectively be ceding its subpoena power. It would also be giving its tacit consent to the dangerous idea of an imperial president — above the law and beyond the reach of checks and balances. The founders did not want that when they wrote the Constitution, and the voters who elected this Congress do not want it today."

By voting against enforcing Congress' subpoenas, Mark Kirk voted to undermine our system of checks and balances, following the bidding of an imperial president who holds his administration above the law. We in the Illinois 10th District expect and deserve better. This is why we must work to replace Mark Kirk with Dan Seals, a Democrat we can count on to protect the foundations of our democracy.



## Lest We Forget: Bush's "Signing Statements"

*This is the first in an ongoing series about the abuses of the Bush administration.*

by George Rosenblit

The U.S. Constitution is the bedrock foundation of our great democracy. It ensures the separation of powers among our three branches of government, the executive branch, the legislative branch, and the judicial branch. This is a system of checks and balances to protect our democracy by restraining any one branch of our government from usurping powers of another branch, thereby preventing the abuse of power. Our founding fathers did not want our nation to drift toward tyranny.

Each president recites the following oath at an inauguration ceremony, in accordance with Article II, Section I of the U.S. Constitution: "I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States."

Has President Bush fulfilled his duties in accordance with this oath? Let's examine the defined relationship between the president and the Congress with regard to the passage of a bill.

Congress has the sole authority to make the laws of the land. Bush's duty is to approve the legislation by signing it, or to veto it by returning it unsigned to the house of Congress in which it originated within ten

days (excluding Sundays). As president, Bush is constitutionally required to state objections to the legislation in writing, and the Congress is constitutionally required to consider the objections and reconsider the legislation. If the Congress overrides the veto by a two-thirds majority in each house, the bill becomes law without the president's signature.

The Supreme Court affirmed in 1998 that Congress could not delegate to the president a "line item veto" that would enable him to delete portions of a bill before signing it. Yet, Bush has added over 800 "signing statements" to bills since he has taken office in which he arbitrarily says that he can disagree with (i.e., ignore) any part of the law he has just signed. He has thereby stated that he reserves the right to disobey a law passed by Congress. That is in violation of the Constitution and against the law of the land based on our political doctrine of the separation of powers and the 998 Supreme Court ruling.

As recently as January 30, 2008, an online article at [washingtonpost.com](http://washingtonpost.com) stated that Bush's signing statement to the 2009 Defense Appropriations Bill rejected, among others, the following conditions in the bill: (1) No funds are to be used to establish any military installation or base for the purpose of permanently stationing U.S. Armed Forces in Iraq; and (2) No funds are to be used to exercise control of the oil resources of Iraq. President Bush said that the

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# *Don't Let the Spin Doctors Choose Our Next President*

by Sharon Sanders

We are now heading into what could be the most critical election of our lives. When elected in November, our candidates must reverse seven years of devastation to the very fragile fabric of this great democracy. More than ever, the progressive grassroots movements are the key to assuring that our elected officials do what we, collectively, want them to do.

As a self-appointed "student" of the right-wing movement (conspiracy) in this country for more years than I care to admit, I am unequivocally sure that Frank Luntz, the Republican spin doctor, Karl Rove, Karen Hughes, and others of their ilk, will scour every facet of the candidates' lives as they try to muddy them up. Tidbits, true or not, will be placed in the "media" and magnified many times until each and every piece of dirt is embedded in our psyches. The American public will be trapped into not knowing truth from fiction, the important facts from the slime. We need to strongly put out the message to our voters that we, as Democrats, can be trusted to make our own decisions based on facts, that we can separate the Bill O'Reillys and Rush Limbaughs of this world from the real news sources like McClatchey or Reuters, or (at times) *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*, and the endless number of on-line sites that are determined to give us the truth behind the right-wing lie machine.

As we get closer to the November election, Congress and the administration are in a panic. They're putting a bandage on the economy by buying our votes just in time for the next election. The Fed has lowered interest rates to a level not seen in my lifetime, but the markets have essentially snubbed their nose at these cuts. The Central Bank's interest-rate cuts may be a quick fix for 2008, but they'll create a massive inflationary push in 2009, leading us right back into another boom-bust cycle. The only ones benefiting from these moves are the financial institutions that caused the problems in the first place. Meanwhile, CNBC and many other stations keep insisting everything is just fine and it's those "liberals" with their negative "self-fulfilling prophecy" who are the cause of this terrible economy. The executives, producers, and reporters of these stations, with their numerous spins, need to step outside their ivory towers and take a leisurely trip across America. They may return with a totally different picture.

We, as voters, must insist that real reform in the financial industry takes place now, not later. And we should not be intimidated into believing that all government is bad. Corporate America and this administration would lead us to believe that we are better off without

any regulatory agencies. Well, then, who is defending us against unsafe pharmaceuticals produced either here or in China, toys and paint with lead, healthcare gone awry, an unhealthy environment dominated by the interests of oil companies, foods and water with pesticides, unsafe and unfair labor practices, and underfunded public schools? And a special note: Mark Kirk just voted against reasonable safety protections for miners. We need to look very closely at his track record on protecting the consumer.

So our job, as informed voters, is not to be swayed by the dirty tactics of the right-wing spin machine and, instead, to vote what we know is right. It can be done. We must become informed on the real issues and determine how we can right the wrongs of this horrendous administration. We can look beyond what the media and the administration want us to see. Whether Obama gives a scornful look at Hillary during a debate or Hillary sheds a tear that may or not be sincere is hardly relevant at such a critical time in our history. We aren't in a "war on terror" in Iraq, but we did invade the country preemptively without cause; we did not go after Bin-Laden, for some reason yet to be determined; we are all "pro-life;" we are all "value" voters; we are all "patriotic," and disapproval of the lies that got us into this war does not make us less patriotic; our skies are not "clear;" being "fiscally conservative" cannot exclude the cost of the war to our children and grandchildren; "trickle down" economics only works if it trickles down, which it doesn't; "homeland security" reminds me of the Third Reich; social programs are not all bad; the unfunded "No Child Left Behind" program, "vouchers," and the "faith-based" initiatives are all means of diverting public funds to the private sector; social security is a good program as long as the government stops borrowing from it; Medicare does work; disapproval of torturing prisoners does not make us weak, but it does make us more human; this is not a "Christian" country, but a country of many religions; saying the pledge with mandated "under God" does not make us better Americans; reasonable minimum wages will not bankrupt either the small businessman or corporate America; reasonable taxation pays for the things we can't pay for ourselves, such as roads, schools, police, and firemen; taxing decedents' estates is not necessarily abusive; every citizen is entitled to reasonable healthcare; looking into our politicians' bedrooms will not produce better candidates, but looking into their stances on the issues will. So we must keep our grassroots movements growing and we must inform our citizens of the facts, not just the garbage strewn about by the dirt doctors. If this occurs, we will have excellent candidates and we will win decisively in November.

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## **Capital Punishment** *continued from page 3*

on the issue. Even Republican House Minority Leader Tom Cross has proposed bills raising the standard of proof for death cases to that of "no doubt." While none has yet passed, it is indicative of the increasing concerns on both sides of the aisle about the death penalty.

Perhaps the most significant development since Governor Ryan cleared off death row is the release in February of this year of a study (available at [www.aimillinois.org](http://www.aimillinois.org)) that documents for the first time since the moratorium began the costs of death penalty trials in Illinois. This exhaustively well-documented study, conducted by Elliot Slosar, a recent DePaul graduate in political science who is now on his way to law school, shows that the costs of capital punishment in Illinois were far higher than anyone might have imagined. The average cost to the Illinois taxpayer for each death penalty conviction is over \$11 million. And that is only the cost to the Capital Litigation Trust Fund (CLTF), which funds the defense and prosecution of capital cases. The total does not include the costs of appeals, incarceration, execution, or other expenses incurred in arrest and security associated with potentially capital crimes.

This should close the case. No matter what your view on the right of the state to kill the most violent offenders, when we cannot afford healthcare for our children, public transportation, and so many other vital public services, it is time to abolish the death penalty in Illinois.

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## **Lest We Forget** *continued from page 6*

executive branch shall construe such provisions in a manner consistent with the constitutional authority of the president. In effect, he said that he is not bound by laws passed by Congress – a violation of the Constitution!

This particular instance has serious consequences for Iraq as a sovereign country and for the continuation of U.S. involvement in the Iraq conflict. It remains to be seen how this impasse will be resolved.

We must have a Democrat in the White House and enough seats in Congress to return our government to a sane path, and to protect against a drift toward tyranny and bankruptcy. We must take back America!



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