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Mark Kirk Opposes Voting Security and Enfranchising All Americans

by Ellen Beth Gill

On April 15, 2008, Mark Kirk voted against the Emergency Assistance for Secure Elections (EASE) Act of 2008 (H.R. 5036, Roll Call 188). The bill, which failed because all House Republicans and two Democrats voted against it, would have provided \$500 million to state and local governments wishing to opt in to receive reimbursement from the federal government if they converted to a paper ballot voting system, offered emergency paper ballots, and/or conducted audits by hand counts. Another \$100 million would have been available to states and local governments that conducted audits under specified standards. The failure of the bill mystified its sponsor, New Jersey Congressman Rush Holt, as the same bill passed out of the House Administration Committee just two weeks before with strong bipartisan support, including the votes of several who ultimately voted it down. The bill had 92 cosponsors.

One possible reason for the change of heart among

Join us for Tenth Dems U's Primary Night Get-Together

INDIANA/NORTH CAROLINA RESULTS
VIEWING PARTY & DISCUSSION

Tuesday, May 6 at 7:00 p.m.
The Bar-B-Q Pit

589 Elm Place, Highland Park

This event is free and open to all!

House Republicans was the White House's emergency, day-of-the-vote press release opposing the EASE Act and claiming that it encouraged redundant and excessive spending. Holt noted in response that "many people who opposed this legislation supported spending almost \$330 million in recent years to provide election assistance in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan." Rarely shying away from spending, the Bush administration was showing its continued support for the K Street Project's notion of election reform, the Orwellian-named Help America Vote Act (HAVA) of 2002 (H.R. 3295, Roll Call 462) that

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Tenth News

MAY 2008

Illinois Tenth Congressional District Democrats Newsletter

Volume 5, Edition 5

Mark Kirk's Most Important Vote

by Steve Sheffey

The most important vote a member of Congress casts is for Speaker of the House. It is fashionable in some circles to call oneself an "independent" and pretend to be above party politics, but the reality is that there are differences between the parties. The party in power elects the Speaker, and the Speaker controls the Congressional agenda.

Mark Kirk would have us believe that he is a moderate (read "Democrat") on some issues, such as stem cell research, the environment, gun control, and reproductive choice. Readers of this newsletter know that Kirk's record is at best questionable on many of these issues. There is no question, however, that Kirk will vote Republican when he is called upon to vote for Speaker of the House, and barring a major leadership shake-up, that means he'll vote for current House Minority Leader John Boehner (R-IN).

Let's take a look at John Boehner's agenda:

In 2007 NARAL Pro-Choice America gave Boehner a rating of zero.

In 2006 Planned Parenthood gave Boehner a rating of zero.

In 2005-2006 the National Right to Life Committee gave Boehner a rating of 100.

In 2007 the American Civil Liberties Union gave Boehner a rating of zero.

In 2007 the National Education Association gave Boehner a grade of F.

In 2007 the League of Conservation Voters gave Boehner a rating of zero.

In 2006 the League of Conservation Voters gave Boehner a rating of zero.

In 2005 the League of Conservation Voters gave Boehner a rating of zero.

In 2006 the Gun Owners of America gave Boehner a rating of 100.

In 2006 the National Rifle Association gave Boehner a rating of A.

Source: Project Vote Smart

If Mark Kirk is really an advocate for reproductive choice, gun control, and the environment, then maybe he should switch parties. Congressional Republicans elected Boehner Minority Leader, and if Republicans retake the House, Boehner will set the agenda.

A vote for Kirk is a vote for Boehner's agenda because it will take a Republican majority to elect Boehner Speaker of the House. Party labels matter.

This district leans Democratic. We must help the majority of people in this district who will vote Democratic for President understand that they should vote for Dan Seals for the same reasons. Even if they think that Kirk is a moderate — and he's not — a vote for Kirk is a vote for an agenda at odds with the agenda of most voters in our district. If we can help voters grasp this reality, all the money in the world will not be able to stop Dan Seals from defeating his Republican opponent.



*House Minority Leader
John Boehner (R-IN)*

Mark Kirk, We Have a Problem

by Mark Kraemer

By now, we've all seen evidence of the subprime mortgage crisis and its effect on the U.S. economy. News stories about home foreclosures, huge investment banks that have gone virtually bankrupt, and borrowers who were duped by unscrupulous lenders have aired in the media for months.

Economists have said that the subprime mortgage crisis has put the U.S. economy in its most precarious position since the Great Depression. Stock prices have fluctuated wildly in reaction to the latest foreclosure rates. Investors are nervous, and ordinary homeowners are suffering — many having lost their homes already. Mark Kirk, we have a problem.

Much of the problem concerns millions of homeowners who are no longer able to afford their mortgage payments. Many, if not most, of these homeowners purchased adjustable rate mortgages (ARMs) when they bought their homes. Interest rates on these loans are, of course, subject to change in the years after they are purchased. An ARM that is affordable early on may reset in later years, many times to a higher rate. This resetting of the interest rate causes a rise in monthly payments on the loan, and this phenomenon is at the heart of the foreclosure problem today — people who could once afford their monthly mortgage payments can no longer do so once their ARM resets to a higher rate.

But didn't these homeowners know that they might one day pay a higher rate? Didn't they know what might happen if their rate went up?

The problem is, many of these borrowers did not know the extent of their exposure to financial risk. In many cases, they were misled by unscrupulous mortgage lenders who were eager to sell as many mortgages as possible, regardless of the ability of the purchaser to pay off the loan over the long term. Many borrowers (particularly in lower-income neighborhoods) had their mortgage applications filled out inaccurately by brokers who inflated the borrowers' income levels. Banks that have been allowed to sell risky mortgages to far-off investors have also contributed to the problem.

It is estimated that 2.2 million families could lose their homes to foreclosure in the next two years. February home foreclosures in Lake County alone were up 35 percent in 2008 over February 2007 levels. Mark Kirk, we have a problem.

Recognizing a looming problem, Democrats in the House of Representatives proposed solutions months ago. Last November, Democrats including Illinois' own Melissa Bean introduced the Mortgage Reform and Anti-Predatory Lending Act (MRA) of 2007. This bill provides for: national licensing and registration of mortgage originators, with training requirements; better disclosure of loan terms; prohibition of practices like compensating lenders for steering borrowers into more expensive loans; and liability for those companies that buy, sell, and securitize loans they know borrowers cannot repay. The bill won bipartisan support as a commonsense reform measure and was passed on November 15, 2007. Sixty-four Republicans joined ALL the House Democrats to vote YES and pass the bill by a vote of 291-127.

How did our Republican representative Mark Kirk vote on this much-needed legislation? He voted NO.

How could Kirk have been so blind to the merits of this bill? With so many of our current problems caused by reckless and unethical behavior in the home mortgage industry, how could Kirk not see that the reforms outlined in the bill are needed?

The reasons? It's probably no surprise to many that Kirk owes allegiance to wealthy members of the financial services industry.

Wealthy bankers, mortgage lenders, and homebuilders are among Kirk's most devoted supporters. And the banking and mortgage industry is worried that reforms, no matter how needed, will hurt their profits. Bankers, mortgage lenders, and homebuilders don't like regulation in general, and they don't like seeing their profits reduced. Kirk's allegiance to these special interests surely explains, in part, his NO vote on the Mortgage Reform Act of 2007.

Another explanation is that, for all his efforts to portray himself as a moderate, Kirk is at heart a staunch conservative. Conservatives don't like regulation, period.

Kirk's staunch conservatism is no help in a situation as daunting as the current mortgage/foreclosure crisis. What is needed now is a philosophy that is open to a broad-based solution to the problem — a solution that will both help those suffering now and prevent the problem from happening again.

When discussing his NO vote on the MRA of 2007 in public, Kirk will argue that the increased

regulations included in the bill will drive up the cost of lending, making mortgages less affordable — particularly to low-income borrowers. But contrary to such claims, it is not reform that increases the cost of borrowing money; it is FRAUD and the lending abuses of an under-regulated industry that drive up cost. Examples of these fraudulent practices include lax regulation that has allowed lenders to steer many low-income borrowers into the MOST EXPENSIVE loans of all over time — the subprime ARMs that are at the root of the current problem.

These loans often include hidden costs that inflate expenses. Predatory lenders have also steered borrowers with good credit into MORE EXPENSIVE subprime loans even though their credit scores were high enough to qualify for conventional loans with far better terms.

Sorry, Mark, but targeted regulation could eliminate deceptive practices that make borrowing MORE EXPENSIVE to your constituents. What is the good of offering low income borrowers easy credit if lenders are allowed (through lax regulation) to mislead them in so many different ways?

Surely Kirk must be aware that fraudulent and predatory lending practices are widespread and play a major role in the current crisis — here in Illinois and across the nation. If he employs fuzzy logic to explain his NO vote on the MRA of 2007, it's nothing compared to his earlier public statements deliberately designed to mislead constituents about this legislation.

Kirk claimed at a recent town hall meeting that when the Illinois State Legislature tried to reform the mortgage lending industry, pastors on the south side of Chicago and many residents there vehemently protested the reforms. Kirk was implying that any approach to reform that caused so much protest must surely be misguided. But Kirk's use of this



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What's Top-of-Mind in Northbrook?

by Susan Beck

There is the old saw about never talking politics or religion because these topics can cause blood pressure to rise and tempers to flare. But sometimes, there is no better topic than politics, especially during this presidential election year.

To provide a forum for individuals to express their politics, views, and concerns in a comfortable environment, Tenth Dems hosted one of our "Let's Talk Politics" events at the Northbrook Public Library on April 22. Sharon Sanders moderated the discussion, which drew more than 30 participants from across the 10th Congressional District and beyond.

Here are some of the highlights:

✓ Good news for Democrats! A lot of newly registered "grassroots" voters, and especially those in support of the Democratic ticket, have been hard to quantify and are probably very underestimated since pollsters continue to use old school techniques in measuring voter participation.

✓ Everyone is exhausted by the biases exhibited by the press in reporting election activities. The overwhelming example given was how George Stephanopoulos and Charles Gibson moderated (or, maybe didn't moderate) the recent Obama/Clinton debate. Where was a discussion of the issues?

✓ Speaking of issues, why aren't the candidates talking about the fact that so many of our regulatory agencies have been stripped of their regulatory powers by Bush administration budget cuts and agency appointments? The agency coming under the most criticism was the FDA and its increasingly questionable drug approval process.

✓ The subprime crisis was not far from everyone's mind and the commonsense solution to simply freeze interest rates on variable rate mortgages for a given period of time was well-received. What was not well-received was Mark Kirk's support for bailing out banks first and homeowners a distant second.

✓ Gasoline, gasoline, gasoline. For every one penny rise in the price of gas, one billion dollars is taken out of consumers' hands that could have been spent on other purchases. Yes, high gas prices hurt and we all wish they would subside, but there was also the realization that with pain may come some much needed change in behavior when it comes to car-buying and driving habits.

✓ So, who knows why we are in Iraq? Not anyone in the discussion group. One major concern is the continued reduction in recruitment standards, which has led to fewer high school graduates entering the military and even the acceptance of some recruits with minor felony records.

✓ Immigration was on the front burner. Everyone agreed that confusion still surrounds how best to define the problem. One solution, however, was suggested in absentia — Mark Kirk's recommendation that condoms be given to every man in Mexico. Short-term solution? No. Long-term solution? Still no.

A special guest was introduced, one whom everyone should know about and support. She is Pamela E. Loza, Democratic candidate for Judge of the 12th Judicial Subcircuit in Cook County. She has a whole list of positive judicial evaluations that should make you want to remember her name on November 4th. Check out her website: lozafordjudge.com.

Lest We Forget: Bush's Torture Agenda

The soul of our moral fiber is under siege

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

by George Rosenblit

On April 9, 2008, *ABC World News* (<http://abcnews.go.com/print?id=4583256>) reported that the most senior Bush administration officials discussed and approved "Enhanced Interrogation" (Torture) techniques in dozens of top secret meetings. They signed off on how the CIA would interrogate top al Qaeda suspects, including combined techniques. This story also appeared on April 10 in the *Washington Post* online, and on April 11 in an Associated Press article in jdnews.com.

It is important to know that this "National Security Principals Committee" met in the White House and included Vice President Cheney, then National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, Secretary of State Colin Powell, CIA Director George Tenet, and Attorney General John Ashcroft. The decisions of this committee were adopted down the chain of military command, as well as in the CIA.

In an exclusive interview with ABC News on Friday, April 11, 2008, President Bush told Martha Raddatz that he knew his top national security advisers discussed and approved specific details about how high-value al Qaeda suspects would be interrogated by the Central Intelligence Agency. So this means that Bush must assume full responsibility for the torture agenda. People of low rank who were

WE'RE STILL TALKING POLITICS!

Join the Tenth Congressional District Democrats in another in a series of coffees throughout the district:

Wednesday, May 7, at 7:00pm
at the Panera Bread at Arlington
Heights Annex Shopping Center,
5 West Rand Road

Thursday, May 15, at 7:00pm
at the Caribou Coffee,
725 N. Milwaukee Avenue
Libertyville

Wednesday, May 21, at 7:00pm
at the Waukegan Public Library

- Add your voice to the discussion.
- Have you read any good political books?
- Want to talk about a particular article?
- The stage is yours.
- Everyone and their opinions are welcome.
- Bring your friends—we love to see new faces.

For more information, call 847-266-VOTE (8683)
or email events@TenthDems.org.

REFRESHMENTS ARE ON US!

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What's Important Now

by Carol Hillsberg

"... at this moment, in this election, we can come together and say, 'Not this time.'" In this, his speech about race, Barack Obama decried the tendency of candidates to focus on distractions, rather than on the issues that truly matter. The Presidential frontrunner stated that this time, in this campaign, we must focus instead on crumbling schools, denial of healthcare, unemployment, the war in Iraq, and caring for the veterans of that conflict. In other words, it is not in the interest of all of us to replay ad nauseum the YouTube video of Reverend Wright, nor the "misspoken" version of Hillary's arrival in Bosnia in 1996. Instead the rhetoric should be positive, emphasizing what each candidate would do to try to solve our problems.



What Barack Obama did not say in his speech is that now both candidates should also focus on the enormous differences in policy, beliefs, and temperament between these two Democrats and the presumptive Republican nominee — John McCain. Mark Shields stated this idea so well on PBS's *The News Hour*, weeks before the Pennsylvania vote. And, he is not the only one, certainly, who advocates this strategy.

Are You Kidding, Mr. Kirk?

by Sharon Sanders

Are you kidding, Mr. Kirk? You can't have it both ways. You, as a board member of the conservative National Endowment for Democracy, espouse global democracy abroad; but you consistently vote with President Bush to restrict the very freedoms you demand from and for the rest of the world. You vote for FISA warrants without cause, immunity from prosecution for telecom companies, and torture of prisoners (in violation of the Geneva Convention). You vote against network neutrality, and in favor of Harriet Miers' and Joshua Bolton's disregard of congressional subpoenas. You vote for worldwide human rights, but in the name of national security and the so-called "war on terror," you vote to take our human rights away. That's not democracy.

And, the bastion of democracy, a strong public education system, you vote to leave horrendously underfunded, a school system so devastated by your party's No Child Left Behind mandates that teachers are left with little time to build our next generation of thinkers and decision makers. Instead, such policies are turning our children into robotic test takers. Is that the democracy you want?

You talk about a fiscally responsible budget here at home (Republican-speak for "no social programs"), but you forget to mention that your war (in which over 4,000 American soldiers are now dead) is bleeding us dry, costing billions of dollars a week with no-bid contracts — money we don't have but borrow from sovereign nations that continue to buy up American companies. And you, Mr. Kirk, voted against reasonable leaves between redeployments for our exhausted soldiers.

The spiraling mess in the economy is a mess you and your party's administration made with your anti-regulatory policies. You voted against the Anti-Predator Lending bill that would enable the average person to fairly obtain a mortgage, yet you are willing to implement a temporary Home Owners Loan Corporation, which first and foremost bails out the very industry that caused our economic problems in the first place. This proposal, along with the economic stimulus package, will pour billions and billions of dollars into our black hole of debt, leaving us without funds to rebuild our crumbling infrastructure. But, now, under the guise of fiscal responsibility, you're waving the flag against earmarks and pork while, over the years, you've asked Congress for your fair share of pet

Whereas Senators Obama and Clinton espouse very similar ideas on the issues that are important to voters, Senator McCain stands apart. For example, McCain is fervently anti-choice, and he has vowed to pack the Supreme Court with like-minded justices. Senator McCain does not call for a gradual withdrawal of troops from Iraq. Instead, he supports the "surge" and anything it would take to "win" this war, although what defines "winning" is uncertain. And, for our troubled economy he recommends the quintessential Republican policies of tax cuts for the rich and little government aid for the victims of the housing debacle and the changes in our economy that have left widespread unemployment in their wake. On healthcare he recommends relying on competition among providers to lower costs; he has no proposal for universal healthcare. And, I saw nothing on his website that would deal with our crumbling schools and other problems not touched by No Child Left Behind.

To quote the greatest Republican, Abraham Lincoln, "A house divided against itself cannot stand." Although Lincoln uttered these words at a different time, 1858, about a different issue, slavery, it is a guiding principle now as then. Both Democratic candidates, Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, should insure that the Democratic house is not divided against itself. Both candidates should focus on their differences with the latter-day Republicans and their candidate, John McCain. Both Democrats should focus on their own strengths, their own ideas, rather than on the murky waters of guilt by association or revision of recent history.

projects: \$800,000 for the City of Waukegan and its harbor, money to stop the spread of the ash borer, condoms for all Mexican males, and the list goes on. So where's all that fiscal responsibility you talk about? I guess, it all depends on one's priorities.

You continue to push for permanent tax cuts for the rich, yet you oppose bankruptcy court intervention for the average person as individuals fall deeper and deeper in debt. You want ridiculously low limits on malpractice lawsuits for the injured individual, but no regulation on credit cards, banks, and mortgage companies and their usurious interest rates. So the individual must take full responsibility for his actions, but not the corporations. A Federal Reserve 2.5 percent interest rate bail-out of Bear Stearns (a company that failed to disclose its extensive subprime portfolio and failing hedge funds to its investors) is fine with you, but the average citizen still can't take advantage of the lowest interest rates in our history while credit card companies continue to raise their finance charges to financially strapped borrowers. You are unwilling to negotiate for lower pharmaceutical costs or to allow individuals to obtain prescriptions from Canada. Who are you protecting? Definitely not the average American citizen and your constituents.

The list of hypocrisies seems endless. You came into Congress billing yourself as a true conservative, with financial backing from DeLay, Blunt, Wilkes, and others, including Rezko, but you've evolved into a self-styled "moderate" with your change of heart on issues such as the environment, same-sex marriages, SCHIP, and a woman's right to choose. Have you really changed or are you running scared? It seems to me that when it comes to the big votes, you're right there with your right-wing cronies, touting no taxes, no regulation, no protection for the little guy, laissez-faire economics, free trade agreements that hurt the American worker, restrictions on our Constitutionally protected freedoms, and excessive power in the executive branch — advantages only for corporate conglomerates and the rich.

So, Mr. Kirk, you can take all the photo-ops you want, but when the line is drawn in the sand, first and foremost, your record indicates that the well-being of the individual is not nearly as important as protecting the military-industrial complex. That's not what democracy is all about, and certainly not characteristic of the independent, thoughtful leadership the 10th District deserves.

The Not-So-Secret Secret (*no one wants to talk about*)

by Carol Lieberman

Raising taxes — the third rail of American politics. Even hint at the possibility and the candidate's chances are dead. Which is why we see both of our candidates promising to "return to the pre-Bush-tax-cut levels" and "to only raise taxes for the wealthiest Americans," while at the same time promising us much-needed universal healthcare, better schools, cheaper student loans, and a host of other important programs. And we nod our heads and smile and say, "This is good." But is it really?

Sure, the most knowledgeable voters recognize it's not possible to do so many things without funding for them, but they cross their fingers and hope that the implemented programs will be the ones they most want and the money to pay for them will come from somebody else. The rest of the electorate simply grumbles, "All politicians lie, so I may as well stay home...or go vote for the guy I'd rather have a beer with." Clearly, neither of these strategies makes for good and responsible government; and neither will ensure us, and our children, the lives we desire.

So who is to blame for this dysfunctional relationship between politicians and voters? We are! And we — each and every one of us — will have to fix it.

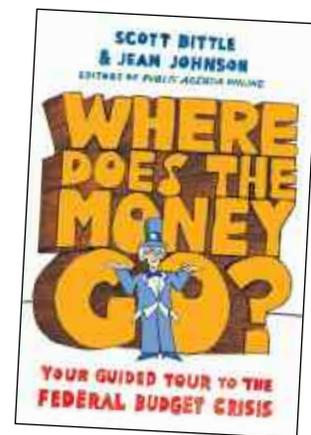
A few weeks ago, the WTTW program, *Bill Moyer's Journal*, focused on a recently published book, *Where Does All The Money Go? Your Guided Tour to the Federal Budget Crisis* (Harper Collins paperback). 'Sounds pretty awful, doesn't it? But in fact, it's a fun, easy read that will surely get you thinking about how the government spends its money and the impact this will have on all of us in the very near future. The authors, Scott Bittle and Jean Johnson, work for the nonprofit and nonpartisan research organization, Public Agenda (www.publicagenda.org), and their aim is to help ordinary people understand our federal budget. Once armed with that understanding,

Bittle and Johnson believe, people will begin to make rational choices on what should be our priorities.

After introducing a few key concepts necessary to understanding the budget debate, and providing a few basic definitions, such as the difference between the Federal Deficit (annual shortfall) and the Federal Debt (cumulative deficits), the book describes just how we got into our over \$9 trillion mess and lays out a number of not pretty, but very plausible, scenarios that will ensue if we don't start taking this issue seriously. Pointing out that in 31 of the past 35 years the government has spent more than it has taken in, the authors describe just where the money comes from and where it is spent, on an annual basis. They also debunk some of the commonly assumed solutions to the budget imbalance. For example, if you think cutting out wasteful spending or bringing the troops home from Iraq will do the trick, think again. After laying out the scope of the problem, Johnson and Bittle go on to examine a variety of solutions — changing entitlement programs, cutting subsidies and other programs, and raising taxes, to name a few general categories — that could be implemented to turn things around. They even give tools to let the reader try his own hand at budgeting. Fun illustrations, great quotes, and charts (with data sources given) make this astonishingly easy reading.

Be warned, however, that there are no prescriptions here. The real beauty of this book is that the ball is left in the reader's court. The authors set out the problem and look at various fixes, but they don't take sides, believing that voters must make the choices for how we solve our financial problems. Public Agenda has found that educational activities can get the public involved in these budget

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True Number of Battlefield Casualties Underreported

by Annette Jacobson

While it's true that our news media give, at most, a sanitized picture of the suffering the occupation in Iraq has created, and while the numbers of the civilian dead are by U.S. military policy not publicly recorded, what is also only part of the story is the official numbers of U.S. service casualties of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

In March the U.S. marked its fifth year in Iraq with the tragic news of the 4,000th service member killed in the war zone. (As of this writing the official number of fatalities is reported at 4,038.) In addition to these deaths, the devastating facts about these wars' casualties continue to leak out. The Department of Defense on April 8, in an effort to conceal bad news from the public and press, quietly released the new U.S. battlefield casualty statistics from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars: 74,713.

The group monitoring these statistics is Veterans for Common Sense, which provides advocacy and publicity for issues related to veterans in Washington, D.C. Casualty is defined as killed, wounded, injured, and ill for other physical reasons. The war in Afghanistan caused more than 9,000 casualties as of last month. The Iraq war caused more than 65,000. Veterans for Common Sense quotes the Department of Defense casualty report as listing more than 70,000 non-fatal casualties, plus nearly 4,500 deaths from the two war zones — for a grand total of 74,713 battlefield casualties.

To this total should be added 120,000 men and women that the Veterans Administration reports have been diagnosed with a mental health condition. The VA expects eventually to treat 300,000 patients from the

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Having signed up with the Obama campaign to provide housing for out-of-state volunteers, I found myself hosting a trio of Brits — Kris Brown, Paul Burgin, and Kate Samuels — for a week in March. It was delightful for me to see their enthusiasm in being a part of history in this country. We became good friends and continue to communicate about our election process and developments via email. Their story follows, in their own words. ~George Rosenblit

Campaigning for Obama: A British Experience

(*or how 3 Brits ended up in Chicago*)

by Kris Brown, Paul Burgin, and Kate Samuels

The original idea came from Kris: For some of us to go over and campaign on behalf of Barack Obama. (This isn't quite as strange as it may sound — we're all active campaigners for the Labour party in the UK and have got involved in an Obama Meet-Up group in London.) Most of us lead busy lives at the moment, but somehow three of us managed to find the time to come over in the first week of March. Being involved in any way with a U.S. Presidential election campaign was a new experience for all of us and, for Kris and Paul, it was also their first ever visit to the U.S., so a lot of strange, new and exciting situations were expected. That said, we managed to adapt rather quickly!



The telephone canvassing was not that different to the work that we do for the Labour Party back home, and that helped us find our feet, plus it was fairly easy to grasp some of the finer aspects of American elections that any or all of us were unsure of. The one difference that was very interesting though was the data that the campaign has — far more advanced than we have in Britain. This is something that we've taken home with us and are trying to replicate.

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Kirk Unmasked:

Mark Kirk Helps Undermine Election Integrity



This is the twelfth in an ongoing series.

Republican Congressman Mark Kirk once again has revealed his true self, not as the thoughtful, moderate Republican he pretends to be, but as a loyal accomplice to the Bush-Cheney administration's assault on democracy. He did this by voting against the Emergency Assistance for Secure Elections Act of 2008 (H.R. 5036) — a bill intended to protect the accuracy, integrity, and security of the 2008 general election.

"The right to vote is the most fundamental right of our democracy, as it is the right through which we secure all others," said Representative Rush Holt, the bill's sponsor. "Voters should never have to leave their polling places wondering if their legitimate vote will be counted."

The Emergency Assistance for Secure Elections (EASE) Act proposed to allow states and local jurisdictions to receive reimbursements from the federal governments if they convert to a paper ballot voting system, offer emergency paper ballots, and/or conduct audits by hand counts. The EASE Act would also have provided \$100 million to states and local governments that conducted audits under specified standards.

Following the passage of the 2002 Help America Vote Act (HAVA), numerous states and jurisdictions switched to direct record electronic (DRE) voting systems. The DRE systems leave no paper trail that can be used to verify the accuracy of the election results.

Kirk Opposes Secure Elections *continued from page 1*

was engineered by currently incarcerated former Republican Congressman Bob Ney.

HAVA was originally touted as the solution to those ancient lever voting systems and Floridian punchcards with dangling chads; but it ended up as more of a mandate to states accepting HAVA funding to make quick purchases of direct record electronic voting systems, or "DRE." DRE are those controversial touch screen ballots that do not leave an auditable paper trail. The HAVA remedy for the DRE audit issue is the concept of "verifiable voting." Verifiable voting converts our hard-earned Constitutional right to vote into basic quality control technology that is supposed to give each voter an opportunity to verify the electronic record of his vote. Just how basic the quality control would be under HAVA came to light as the money was disbursed to attach printers to touch screen voting machines that print receipts that may be visible to voters, but remain inside the machines. Such receipts could theoretically allow a voter to verify his or her vote by looking into the machine at the printed receipt before leaving the polling place, but HAVA does not specifically require election officials to show the receipt to the voter. And the legislation does not require officials to give the voter a hard copy for use in later legal proceedings; nor is there any means to assure that the vote printed on the receipt is in fact the vote that is counted by the machine.

For all the well-intentioned sounding rhetoric surrounding HAVA, this legislation ended up being a cash cow for the politically connected e-voting industry and a problem for local governments that had to deal

They've also led to serious election-day problems, including machine failures and incorrectly registered votes. "Many voters watched the machine highlight a candidate they didn't select or fail to indicate a vote for a candidate they did select," states "E-Voting Failures in the 2006 Mid-Term Elections," a report prepared by VotersUnite.org, VoteTrustUSA, Voter Action, and Pollworkers for Democracy.

The EASE Act was unanimously approved in the House Administration Committee by Democratic and Republican members in early April. But, two weeks later it failed on the House floor in the wake of a White House press release opposing the measure on the ground that it would encourage excessive spending. However, as Tenth Dems blogger Ellen Beth Gill points out, many of the House members who voted against the EASE Act, including Congressman Kirk, supported almost \$330 million in election assistance to Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.

Given the intent of the EASE Act — to protect the fairness and accuracy of the 2008 general election — it's hard to understand how any member of Congress could have voted against it — unless that member does not hold dear this feature of American democracy. We should exercise our precious right to vote Mark Kirk out of office. Until we send Dan Seals to Congress in his place, much-needed legislation like the EASE Act will lack the necessary support in the House of Representatives for passage.

with downed machines, unverifiable potential hacking, and anxious voters worried that their votes would not be properly counted.

The Emergency Assistance for Elections Act of 2008 now rejected by Bush, Kirk, and Kirk's fellow House Republicans was designed to help HAVA-upgraded local governments deal with, or avoid altogether, very real Election Day e-voting problems.



So, why would the self-proclaimed thoughtful and independent leader, Mark Kirk, side with partisans and vote against secure, problem-free elections? It seems that Kirk has a history of voting to disenfranchise Americans. He has always been against full voting rights for citizens of the District of Columbia. He also voted for the Federal Election Integrity Act of 2006 (H. R. 4844, Roll Call 459), which would require presentation of a state-issued I.D. in order to vote in federal elections. That bill has been widely criticized by voting rights

advocates, including the League of Women Voters, voting rights attorneys, and judges, as an unconstitutional poll tax and vote suppression measure that violates the poll tax prohibition of the Twenty-Fourth Amendment and the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.

It seems Kirk and his fellow Republicans don't think a fully enfranchised American citizenry voting on secure voting systems would produce victories for them. I would suggest that if Republicans do not feel they can win a fully accessible and fair vote, maybe they need to change their goals and governing methods to make their candidates more attractive to the full electorate. Until the Republicans do so, Americans should insist on secure and truly verifiable voting systems, which is an enforceable Constitutional right. And they should vote Democratic.

Problem *continued from page 2*

example to justify a NO vote on the MRA of 2007 was extremely misleading to constituents attending his meeting that night. The legislation Kirk mentioned that caused so much protest was Ill. HB 4050, a bill designed to prevent selected borrowers in Cook County from being deceived by predatory lenders that went into effect in September of 2005. Kirk didn't mention that this controversial Illinois law so many on the south side protested was COMPLETELY DIFFERENT from the Federal MRA of 2007 — the reform bill he voted against.

Though well-meaning, Ill. HB 4050 unwisely sought to rely solely on consumer education to prevent abuses, and it did nothing to require predatory lenders to clean up their act. It also only applied to borrowers within a small, targeted area on the south side of Chicago. Since the law only applied to a small area, citizens there understandably felt discriminated against. When they protested the law, they were upset not at the regulation, but at the fact that they were being singled out for the regulation. (Kirk also neglected to mention that even in its original form, Ill. HB 4050 DID achieve some success in helping the public avoid fraud. And an improved version of HB 4050 is poised to achieve even greater success protecting borrowers in Illinois.)

Kirk does his constituents a great disservice when he misleads them in this way about an important issue. An issue as important as mortgage reform deserves honest debate, not the kind of misleading rhetoric Kirk employs to score political points.

So, what is Kirk's solution? Kirk's solution to the home mortgage/foreclosure crisis is to restart the Home Owners Loan Corporation

(HOLC), a Federal program begun by Franklin Roosevelt during the Great Depression that bought bad loans from banks and issued new, lower cost loans to distressed borrowers so they could avoid foreclosure and remain in their homes. The program, that ended in 1951, was a success during the Depression. But even if Congress agreed to restart the HOLC now (not guaranteed, by any means), the project would be a time-consuming effort at a time when financial assistance to homeowners is needed immediately. The HOLC was also the product of an earlier era, before the creation of the risky, subprime loan products of today. Most important, the HOLC itself would do nothing to reform the home lending industry so that the deceptive practices of the past (which helped cause our current problems) aren't repeated in the future. As usual, Kirk wants to look the other way when confronted with an industry's abusive, anti-consumer practices. Mark Kirk, we STILL have a problem.

Kirk's conservative philosophy and his loyalty to special interest supporters prevent him from supporting solutions to the mortgage/foreclosure problem that protect consumers. And his deceptive arguments in support of his misguided positions prevent an honest discussion of a very important problem. Wouldn't it be wonderful if our 10th District Congressman was not bound by conservative ideology, or allegiance to wealthy bankers, mortgage lenders, and homebuilders? This November, we can elect Dan Seals — a Democrat who can assess a problem like this one honestly, with an open mind and heart; a representative who will not be bound by ideology or special interests; a representative who will support real world solutions that will help prevent problems from happening in the first place. Let's elect Dan Seals to Congress in 2008!

Lest We Forget *continued from page 3*

punished were not loose cannons torturing prisoners without authority as was originally disclosed. The guilty ones are the entire chain of command, from the top down.

According to an editorial in the *Los Angeles Times* (March 11, 2005) entitled "Torture by Proxy," before 9/11 the CIA occasionally engaged in a practice called "Extraordinary Rendition," sending prisoners overseas to be beaten, drugged, and held in long-term isolation. After 9/11, Bush approved broad latitude in the export of prisoners in so-called terror-related cases to be tortured for information at our behest. They were sent on flights conducted by the CIA to Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Jordan, Uzbekistan, Poland, etc., where human rights are violated with impunity.

Detainees were also held and tortured at Abu Ghraib Prison in Iraq, at Guantanamo (Gitmo) U.S. Naval Base in Cuba, and in Afghanistan where American soldiers and CIA interrogators humiliated and tortured prisoners. An article in *Salon* magazine (http://www.salon.com/news/abu_ghraib/2006/03/14/introduction/print.html) reviewed the public release of 279 photographs and 19 videos from the Army's internal investigation record of a "harrowing three months of detainee abuse inside the notorious (Abu Ghraib) prison."

Information gleaned from many sources indicates that both physical and psychological abuses were used — and there is an overlap in definition. The gamut runs from beatings, sleep deprivation for days at a time, stress positions such as hanging by the wrists from the ceiling with feet barely touching the ground or forced standing resulting in severe physical and psychological pain, exposure naked to sweltering heat and to icy cold (to the point of life-threatening hypothermia), threatening with dogs, waterboarding (drowning just short of death), exploitations of phobias, deprivation of light and other stimuli, and even the use of electric shock, all forbidden in the Army Field Manual. Many persons subjected to these tortures have died.

So, when Bush stated on the occasion of his 2005 State of the Union address that "Torture is never acceptable, nor do we hand over

people to countries that do torture," he lied once again. The Bush administration's actions on torture were approved at the top, in violation of the Geneva Conventions, the International Convention against Torture, U.S. domestic law, and the moral code of the American soldier.

Jack Cloonan, a 25-year veteran of the FBI, was a special agent for the Bureau's Osama bin Laden unit from 1996 to 2002. He describes in an article he wrote for the January/February/March 2008 issue of the *Washington Monthly* how the FBI won the cooperation of detainees with humane treatment in the 1990s. The detainees were promised, repeatedly, that no harm would come to them or their families. They were astonished to find out how much the FBI knew about their networks, their families, and their histories. That's how the FBI knew well before 9/11 how al Qaeda ran surveillance on embassies, who Osama's advisors were, and the important names and pseudonyms in al Qaeda. They also intercepted operations underway and learned how trainees were taught to purchase planes as small weapons. (In spite of the fact that reports were sent routinely to the CIA, no precautions were taken to prevent the disasters of 9/11! This was a most serious unforgivable lapse in priorities management.)

The FBI detainees continue to provide the most reliable information we have in the fight against al Qaeda. The "terrorists" who were tortured after 9/11 have provided the most unreliable information. This was and is a most serious breakdown in intelligent management at the top. Even if the FBI did not forward reports to the CIA, someone on the National Security Principals Committee should have had the intelligence or presence of mind to consult with a team of civilian clinical psychologists on how to conduct effective, non-punitive interrogations.

As the fallout of our actions in conducting torture, U.S. prestige was and is being diminished around the world. It becomes difficult for us to chastise other nations for their treatment of individuals in their countries. Our actions open the door to abuses of our troops and American civilians by enemy forces in times of war. And, ultimately, it

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Secret *continued from page 5*

policy issues, and when that happens, people generally come to some consensus on ways to move the country in the right direction. The book gives concrete suggestions for what each of us, individually and as part of a group, can do to educate others. What's more, it lists plenty of resources to help get the ball rolling. And that's where Tenth Dems can play a pivotal role!

If we, as Democrats, truly care about making the nation safer and the lives of its citizens better, we must provide real leadership in the arena on which all other issues depend. It's too late to have much impact on the November election, but it's not too soon to begin planning. Grassroots action, through the sponsoring of public forums, school programs, and other educational activities, will pave the way to achieving long-term economic health for our country. By doing the advance work, we can build public support and give our congressional representatives the mandate they need to tackle the all-important issue of national financial security.

Lest We Forget *continued from page 7*

just does not make sense to subject human beings to inhumane treatment, on moral grounds. We've lost that high ground, and it did not need to happen!

We, the voters, must take back America in November to recapture that high ground. Democrats must win the presidency and enough seats in both the House and the Senate to reverse the abusive policies of this Republican administration. Most certainly your vote is needed, but your help as a volunteer is also needed to serve on a phone bank or to help in many other productive ways. Just call 847-266-VOTE (847-266-8683) to join our Tenth Dems team.

Casualties *continued from page 5*

two wars. Small wonder that on average veterans are waiting more than six months for the VA to provide badly needed benefits.

But the issue here is that the real numbers of horrific sacrifices by military families and their sons and daughters should be brought to public awareness by being honestly talked about and emphasized by the media. This is truly a modern tragedy caused by the pursuit of an illegal, immoral, and disastrous military policy.

Brits *continued from page 5*

The accent did help and we were amazed, not only at the warmth that we received from some of the people we called, but also at how we inspired people simply by turning up to help. This wasn't completely altruistic though — what goes on in American politics affects the rest of the world, so whilst we respect whatever decisions that are made at the Conventions, and in the elections in November, we have an interest in knowing that the next U.S. President is someone we can trust and feel protected by. For a number of us in the UK, the right person in that regard is Senator Obama.

We were also touched by the welcome we received and the warmth with which many people treated us. It helped a lot and it meant that the three of us have left the U.S. with warm memories and feeling a little bit sad at saying goodbye.

And whilst we can't promise anything, all three of us certainly hope to be back at those telephone banks at some point later in the year — very likely at different times (Kate is planning to come out in October if we get the nomination, for example), and for different lengths of stay. We're doing all we can from this side of the pond — from attending meetings, to running training for phonebanking for U.S. citizens, to signing up Americans who live here to vote, but we all feel that our involvement with the Obama campaign in the U.S. is perhaps a little bit unfinished.