



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on February 12, 2010

Will Illinois Replay 'Massachusetts Miracle'?

At least two U.S. Senate candidates appear to have gone through a revolving door before reaching the election starting gate. U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk (R-Ill.) decided to drop his support for the controversial cap-and-trade bill to reduce carbon emissions upon entering the race for the Republican nomination for the Senate seat formerly held by Barack Obama. Kirk, frequently described as a Republican "moderate," handily won the February 2 primary over his more conservative opponent, lawyer and political newcomer Patrick Hughes.



The five-term Congressman captured 56.6 percent of the vote in a six-candidate race, while Hughes, his closest rival, drew only 19.3 percent. Kirk will face state Treasurer Alexi Giannoulias in the November election

Kirk voted in the House for cap-and-trade legislation just last summer, but as a Senate candidate, he says he would oppose the bill. In Massachusetts, Republican Scott Brown, who stunned the political world last month by winning the Senate seat held for 47 years by Edward M. Kennedy, had supported a similar cap-and-trade program as a state legislator. But as a Senate candidate, he, too, said he would oppose the federal plan.

Kirk is "pro-choice" on abortion and voted against the federal ban on partial-birth abortions. But he supported the Stupak amendment to ban federal funding of abortion as part of the healthcare bill passed by the House last year. That's not likely to appease the party's pro-life conservatives like Hughes, who campaigned in the primary against what he called Kirk's "incredible social liberalism."

Indeed, Kirk has voted in Congress against a bill to prohibit the transporting of a minor across state lines to receive an abortion without the consent or at least notification of a parent or a legal guardian. He voted in favor of lifting a ban on abortions on U.S. military bases overseas. He was also an outspoken opponent in 2008 of a proposed regulation by the Bush administration's Department of Health and Human Services that would allow healthcare providers to refuse to counsel women about birth control or abortion. A year earlier Kirk spoke out in support of an approach to border security that was, to say the least, unusual. The Illinois Congressman favored a proposal to donate condoms to Mexico to hasten a decline in the Mexican birth rate.

"A slower rate of growth of Mexico's population would improve the economy of Mexico. It would also reduce the environmental pressure on Mexico's ecosystem," Kirk said. "But a slower rate of growth would also reduce the long-term illegal immigration pressure on America's borders."

In recent years Kirk has received grades D, F and F- from the National Rifle Association and the Gun Owners of America. He attempted to resurrect the congressional ban on so-called assault weapons after it had expired, and he supports laws to require trigger locks on guns and a closing of the "gun show loophole" on requirements for background checks and waiting periods. The Congressman also voted for



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the McCain-Feingold Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002 with its provision to ban corporations and labor unions from running independent ads naming a candidate or candidates within 30 days of party primary or 60 days of a general election. The U.S. Supreme Court recently ruled that portion of the act an unconstitutional abridgement of the freedom of speech. He has also joined the campaign against "hate crimes," voting last year in favor of a bill to provide federal assistance to states, municipalities, and Indian tribes to enforce hate-crime laws. Kirk voted in 2008 to commit up to \$700 billion to the Wall Street bailout. He did, however, vote this year against the Obama \$787 billion stimulus plan.

While Kirk was taking a majority of the vote in his six-way race, his Democratic opponent Giannoulis got just under 39 percent in his race against four lesser-known opponents. David Hoffman, a former federal prosecutor who had never run for office trailed the frontrunner by just over five percent, taking 33.7 percent of the primary vote. During the primary campaign, Giannoulis was hounded by questions about his handling as state Treasurer of a college savings program that lost \$150 million, some of which has been recovered. There were also issues raised about loans made by his family's Broadway Bank, where he was employed as loan officer before he entered politics.

Among those receiving substantial loans from the bank was Antoin Rezko, a real estate developer and political fundraiser whose conviction for fraud and bribery have been an embarrassment for Illinois politicians who have had financial or political ties to him — including Barack Obama. The issue is certain to be an ongoing one in the general election. The Republican Senatorial Campaign committee has already been running a web ad, charging that Giannoulis loaned \$15.4 million to Michael "Jaws" Jurango, whom the ad identifies as a mobster convicted of running a prostitution ring and illegal gambling. The ad, which seems likely to provoke a backlash from Italian-Americans, is entitled "He'd Make Tony Soprano Proud."

While Giannoulis does not have a voting record, his stands on issues indicate he would be a reliably liberal vote among Senate Democrats. He supports the Democrats' healthcare reform plan, including the single-payer provision. He has adopted the Bill Clinton line on abortion, saying: "I believe abortion should be safe, legal and rare." He supports the right of states to define same-sex unions as marriage and would work to repeal the federal Defense of Marriage Act. He also supports mandatory trigger locks (or, a law to "make guns childproof") and a revival of the "assault weapons" ban. ("No one needs a semi-automatic weapon on the streets of Chicago.") He favors "closing the loopholes that allow criminals to avoid background checks" and would "fight efforts to allow concealed weapons on our trains and in our national parks."

The No Child Left Behind Act "had the right goals, but the wrong strategy and inadequate funding," Giannoulis said. The program "should be reformed to reduce the focus on standardized tests and provide support for teachers and schools that are underperforming." Kirk voted for the No Child Left Behind Act when it was passed by Congress in 2001. Neither candidate, apparently, believes that education should be left entirely in the hands of state and local jurisdictions as the Constitution requires.

Giannoulis has been described as a basketball-playing friend of Barack Obama, but the President stayed out of the intra-party battle and the White House cannot be happy that the closeness of the primary win has set off what the *New York Times* described as "a new round of worrying among Democrats that the reliably Democratic seat might be picked off by Republicans in November."

In a state where all the major offices are held by Democrats and Democratic voters heavily outnumber



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Republicans, the GOP has high hopes that Mark Kirk can pick off what has been a reliably Democratic seat in the Senate and possibly help the party capture control of the upper chamber this fall. Illinois, they say, could provide a Midwestern echo of the Scott Brown win in the Northeast, a repeat of the "Massachusetts Miracle." Genuine believers in limited constitutional government may yet pray for greater miracles.



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