

Supreme Court ruling expected to make Illinois Senate race costlier, uglier

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Posted by Monique Garcia at 8:52 p.m.

Already a hotly-contested race, the campaign for President Barack Obama's former U.S. Senate seat is expected to get uglier and more expensive following today's [Supreme Court ruling](#) that corporations and unions can spend as much as they want to sway voters.

"Big money is going to interject itself into federal elections," said Kent Redfield, a political science professor at the University of Illinois-Springfield. "And people with money always have an advantage over people without money."

The high court's ruling led the respective front runners in Illinois' U.S. Senate primaries to start attacking each other on the issue before the Feb. 2 election has even taken place.

Democratic Senate candidate Alexi Giannoulias released a statement Thursday decrying the court's decision, saying it gives power to "the very corporate special interests that got us into this economic mess."

Giannoulias, the freshman state treasurer, also criticized Republican Senate candidate Rep. Mark Kirk, saying Kirk has taken more corporate money in his time in office "than just about any other politician."

Kirk's campaign countered with a statement of its own.

"According to state and federal records, Alexi Giannoulias took \$504,700 from corporate and union Political Action Committees as state treasurer and already accepted another \$63,500 from special interest, business and union PACs in his bid for Senate," Kirk spokesman Eric Elk said. "In the wake of Rod Blagojevich and Roland Burris, Illinois voters deserve better."

Blagojevich, the indicted Democratic ex-governor, appointed Democrat Burris to the Senate seat that Blagojevich is accused of trying to sell to benefit himself and his family.

While the decision means corporate cash will flow more freely, it also leaves candidates with less control over their message because unions and corporations can run TV spots and other advertising without the knowledge or approval of candidates.

That may not manifest itself in time for the Feb. 2 primary election, said Redfield, but it sets the stage for a brutal November election. It also raises questions of accountability for candidates who benefit from corporate spending.

"If they make big expenditures on your behalf and you win, then how are you going to deal with the legislative agenda assuming you'd like them to spend that money on your behalf in the next election?" Redfield said. "This shifts the focus away from individuals and I don't think that's healthy in terms of the democratic process and people's faith in the process of government."

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