

Don't skip the undercards on this year's ballot

Local, legislative races can deeply impact everyday lives

By Joseph Ryan | Daily Herald Staff

Published: 11/3/2008 12:04 AM

More Coverage

Related links

- [Complete election coverage](#)

Stories

- [Mock the vote](#) [11/3/08]
- [Vallas won't run](#) [11/3/08]

While the national battle between John McCain and Barack Obama has drawn the most attention, suburban voters will find a long list of races on Tuesday that could have a significant impact.

"Anytime someone can tax you, you should know who they are," says political professor Paul Green of Roosevelt University. "You now have the opportunity to elect people who are going to be taking money out of your pocket."

Come Tuesday, the balance of power in the Illinois Legislature and Congress are hanging on how suburban voters cast their votes in polls from Des Plaines to Elgin and from Antioch to Naperville.

Democrats have been aggressive this season in targeting suburban seats to pad their majorities in both Springfield and Washington, D.C., as they hope Obama voters will boost their Election Night tallies.

On the state level, House Speaker Michael Madigan and Senate Democratic leaders have poured millions of dollars into about a dozen races as they try to dislodge veteran incumbent Republicans and make bids on open seats. The normally low-level races have sparked scores of political mailers and dozens of cable ads.

On the congressional level, Democratic challengers are aiming to unseat incumbent Republicans in districts from Zion to Joliet.

Republican upstarts also are making bids in the 8th District, which covers parts of Lake, McHenry and Cook counties, as well as far west suburban 14th District. Republican physician Steve Sauerberg is making a run against the better-funded incumbent Dick Durbin for the U.S. Senate.

Yet while these races are all set a part from the top of the ticket, they may be heavily influenced by what voters feel about the presidential candidates.

Republicans are fearful a strong Obama tide in the suburbs could run the GOP out of several districts in Northwest Cook County, Lake County, DuPage County and Elgin.

"There could be some strong Obama numbers, and you have to be able to stand out on the ballot, otherwise you could get swept under," says state Rep. Jim Durkin, a Western Springs Republican who co-chairs McCain's Illinois campaign.

For their part, GOP leaders have attempted to tie Democratic challengers to Gov. Rod Blagojevich and Cook County Board President Todd Stroger.

A late-campaign radio ad released by Illinois Republicans says, "If you want to make real change in Springfield vote Republican for state representative and state senator."

The pattern repeats itself on the congressional level. Democratic challenger Dan Seals was endorsed in a radio ad by Obama this weekend in his bid against U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, a Highland Park Republican.

Kirk is running ads tying Seals to Blagojevich and Stroger because all three want to raise taxes.

Democrat Jill Morgenthaler, a Des Plaines veteran, is hoping a big Obama turnout swings the election her way. The retired Army colonel has been outspent in her campaign against U.S. Rep. Peter Roskam of Wheaton, who is running ads calling her a Blagojevich "crony" who has done "shady" deals.

Even Republicans have attempted to flip the Obama factor in their favor.

Roskam has sent out mailers encouraging Obama voters to support him. The mailers sparked the Obama campaign to issue a statement endorsing Morgenthaler.

Sauerberg ran a radio ad in the Chicago area featuring a clip of an Obama speech. The ad argued real change would mean voting out Durbin, a close confidant of Obama's.

Other congressional races include: Republican Steve Greenberg's challenge to U.S. Rep. Melissa Bean, a Barrington Democrat seeking her third term in the 8th District; Republican Jim Oberweis rematch with Democrat Bill Foster, who won the 14th District seat of former GOP House Speaker Dennis Hastert in a special election this spring; Democrat Scott Harper's challenge to U.S. Rep. Judy Biggert of Hinsdale and Barrington Hills Mayor Robert Abboud's Democratic challenge to U.S. Rep. Don Manzullo of Rockford.

In the South suburbs, an open seat has sparked a fierce contest between state Sen. Debbie Halvorson on the Democratic side and concrete mogul Marty Ozinga.

"These local races - these are the best opportunity for voters in terms of sending a message," says Kent Redfield, a political science professor at the University of Illinois in Springfield.