



Candidates use others to boost or deflate image

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SPRINGFIELD -- Rod Blagojevich, Karl Rove, Barack Obama and former U.S. Rep. Jerry Weller have something in common this election season.

Each of them is being cast as a bogeyman in a number of races throughout Illinois and the nation.

The idea behind this timeworn campaign tactic is to suggest to voters that Candidate X is bad because he is being supported by a polarizing public figure.

You don't need to look far for examples.

Just as Rod Blagojevich successfully used his predecessor, George Ryan, as a battering ram in both his bids for governor, Republican gubernatorial candidate Bill Brady is reminding voters about Gov. Pat Quinn's ties to Blagojevich.

In some cases, the candidates are using less high-profile figures in an attempt to bolster their support.

In the race for U.S. Senate, Democrat Alexi Giannoulias is casting Karl Rove as the evil spirit in his race against Republican Mark Kirk.

Rove, a top adviser to former President Bush, is affiliated with a group called "American Crossroads," which recently financed a series of ads attacking Democratic candidates.

"It's not surprising that Karl Rove -- the architect of the Bush-Kirk economic policies that drove our economy to the brink of collapse -- is now bringing his bags of Washington-insider money to bailout Congressman Kirk," Giannoulias said in a prepared statement. "Illinois voters are sick of Karl Rove and Mark Kirk politics."

In the race for Congress in Illinois' 11th district, U.S. Rep. Debbie Halvorson is raising the specter of former U.S. Rep. Jerry Weller's involvement in Republican challenger Adam Kinzinger's campaign.

Weller, a Republican from Morris, held the same seat in Congress now held by Halvorson, a Democrat from Crete. He left office in 2008 and now works as a lobbyist.

"Adam Kinzinger claims he's a fresh face with new ideas but it's obvious now that the same old players pushing the same reckless ideas that have shipped thousands of Illinois jobs overseas are bank-rolling Kinzinger's campaign" said Halvorson campaign spokesman Anthony DeAngelo.

During her first two years in office the Republicans did the same thing to Halvorson, repeatedly attempting to tie her to U.S. Rep. Charles Rangel of New York, who has been embroiled in ethical problems.

Chris Mooney, a political scientist at the University of Illinois-Springfield, said using bogeymen is a way for candidates to simplify the selection process for voters who aren't paying a lot of attention to the candidates' positions on issues.

"They want to make it easy for the voters," Mooney said.

Since many voters pay more attention to image than issues, tying a little-known candidate to a more well-known figure can steer voter preferences.

It works both ways.

Brady, for example, recently imported former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani and former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee for two fundraising events, hoping their star-power would shine a positive light on himself.

Similarly, First Lady Michelle Obama is expected to be in Chicago in mid-October to raise money for Halvorson and other Democratic candidates.

"It's all about image," Mooney said.