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Big names hit Ill. in campaign's waning days

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CHICAGO -- In the final days before the Nov. 2 election, Democrats and Republicans are leaning on party heavyweights, energizing their bases and looking for [swing voters](#) in the high-profile races for President [Barack Obama](#)'s old Senate seat and Illinois governor.

Obama and former President [Bill Clinton](#) will be in Chicago this week to support Democrats Alexi Giannoulias, who is in a razor-tight Senate race against Republican Congressman [Mark Kirk](#), and [Gov. Pat Quinn](#), also locked in a close race with his [GOP](#) challenger.

Kirk is getting a financial boost from two groups backed by GOP guru Karl Rove. The groups have spent about \$4.6 million on the race and helped finance ads against Giannoulias, according to the Sunlight Foundation, a [nonpartisan](#) Washington-based watchdog group that tracks campaign finance numbers.

Democrats have more work to do than Republicans to energize their base, but both sides need to sway independent and swing voters, said Kent Redfield, a professor emeritus of politics at the University of Illinois-Springfield.

While Republicans are charged up ideologically, some Democrats aren't happy with Obama because they've been hurt by the slumping economy, are dissatisfied with his progress on gay rights or think he settled for too little change in health care reform, Redfield said.

"It's kind of finishing the sale with the undecideds, the moderates, and making sure the true-believers get to the polls," he said.

The candidates are doing their part.

Kirk, a five-term congressman from Chicago's northern suburbs, joined other Republican candidates Monday, including Quinn's challenger, state Sen. Bill Brady of Bloomington, at a rally sponsored by a national organization of Jewish Republicans.

"Are you with me?" Kirk asked the crowd of more than 200 people at a suburban Chicago hotel, pledging that Israel would have "no greater friend" in the Senate. Earlier in the day, he'd touted his endorsements by several black ministers.

Kirk worked the crowds at Northwestern and Northern Illinois University football games over the weekend as Giannoulias, the Illinois state treasurer, attended a get-out-the-vote rally in Chicago.

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"We need people to come out and vote. It's such an incredibly, incredibly important election," Giannoulias said.

Giannoulias, who said he's filling his schedule with voter rallies, can use all the attention he can get. Kirk headed into the final weeks of the campaign with four times as much money to spend, despite Giannoulias' fundraising help for from Obama.

Kirk had \$4.4 million available after the quarter that ended Sept. 30, compared to Giannoulias' less than \$1.2 million. Since then, the White House has given more help to Giannoulias, with fundraising visits by both Obama and first lady [Michelle Obama](#) this month.

Giannoulias will get another high-profile boost when Clinton visits Chicago on Tuesday, and Obama is scheduled to come back Saturday.

Two polls this week show Kirk with a slight edge over Giannoulias in a race that would be an embarrassing loss for Democrats - though both candidates have had their share of campaign struggles. Kirk has admitted embellishing aspects of his military service, while Giannoulias has faced questions about the failure earlier this year of his family's Chicago bank.

In the governor's race, Quinn and Brady made their pitch to black voters over the weekend by speaking at a massive church on Chicago's South Side. U.S. Census figures show nearly 15 percent of Illinois' 13 million people are black, with the majority living in Cook County, home to Chicago.

Quinn, the former lieutenant governor, is trying to win a full term to the job he inherited in January 2009, when former Gov. [Rod Blagojevich](#) was removed from office. Quinn has proposed a 1 percentage point increase in the income tax for education as the state struggles with a a \$13 billion deficit, while Brady has flatly rejected raising the income tax.

Quinn said Monday he was looking forward to the Obama and Clinton visits. He said the economy was put in reverse under former President [George W. Bush](#), "so we need to hear about how to put our economy back together again. With President Obama and President Clinton, we have two men who know what they're doing when it comes to the American economy."

After rallying Jewish voters, Brady said he was trying to excite not only Republicans but Democrats and swing voters as well.

"You have to make sure you energize people to actually go to the polls," he said.

Brady is scheduled to appear later this week at a rally in suburban Chicago with Republican governors from Louisiana, Mississippi and Virginia.

Green and Libertarian party candidates are also running in both the Senate and gubernatorial races in Illinois.

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