



Kirk defeats Giannoulis to win Obama's Senate seat in Illinois

Updated 7h 32m ago

By **Judy Keen**, USA TODAY



By Nam Y. Huh, AP

Illinois Senator-elect Mark Kirk celebrates with supporters at his victory celebration in Wheeling, Ill.

CHICAGO — President Obama's former U.S. Senate seat moved into Republican hands Tuesday as U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk narrowly defeated Democratic Illinois Treasurer Alexi Giannoulis, an Obama protégé and basketball buddy.

"Kirk's victory is a pretty sharp poke in the eye to Barack Obama, but it's also a victory for moderate Republicans," says David Yepsen, director of the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at Southern Illinois University.

Alan Gitelson, a political science professor at Loyola University Chicago, agrees that the Republican victory can be interpreted as a repudiation of Obama. "Both symbolically and pragmatically, the Republicans have in the home state of the president made an important statement," he says.

Obama's appearance at a rally here on the final weekend before the election was evidence of the closeness and national importance of the race. It took on "near-mythic proportions" because of Obama's link to the seat, says William Hall, a political science professor at Peoria's Bradley University.

Sen. Roland Burris, a Democrat appointed after Obama's 2008 election by disgraced former governor Rod Blagojevich, also a Democrat, did not run. Also on the ballot: the same candidates in a special election to fill the final days of Obama's term.

The campaign played out in negative TV ads focused on the candidates' credibility. Kirk, 51, acknowledged that he had exaggerated his military record. Giannoulis, 34, defended his management of a state college savings program and the collapse of a bank his family owned.

"The reason the race was very close is that neither candidate was able to take advantage of what should be strengths," says Kent Redfield, a political science professor at the University of Illinois-Springfield.

Giannoulis is "bright, engaging," and his job as treasurer should have highlighted his economic qualifications, he says. Kirk's win, Redfield says, followed the playbook for how a Republican can win in Illinois: "Don't scare swing voters in the suburbs." Kirk focused on his foreign policy and military credentials as a Navy reservist.

Illinois State University political science professor Lane Crothers says Illinois was "ripe for a

We focus on automating Marriott® Hotels' global invoice process. So they don't have to.

Learn more at RealBusiness.com

xerox Ready For Real Business

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™



Republican sweep." Democratic Gov. Pat Quinn was locked in a close race with GOP state Sen. Bill Brady late Tuesday. The state last elected a Republican governor and U.S. senator in 1998.

"There appears to be a combination of frustration with the Democratic Party and with the structural weakness in the economy," Crothers says.

Yepsen says Kirk's win is a "huge psychological blow" to Democrats, an "enormous headache" for Obama and a signal that he must "recalibrate his administration and also his style."

The advertisement features the USA TODAY logo at the top left. The main title "AutoPilot" is in large, bold black font, with a blue airplane icon to its right. Below the title is a smartphone displaying the app's interface, which includes a "USA TODAY Meeting" section for Sep 21, 2009, and a flight status for "A6 BNA to IAD Landed" on 09/21/2009 at 11:48 AM. Other items on the screen include weather for "Washington (AD)" and a "View a Flickr gallery of Washington" link. To the right of the phone, the text reads "The new travel app for iPhone® and iPod touch®". Below this is the "Presented by: Hampton" logo. At the bottom right, a blue box contains the text "SEE HOW IT WORKS »".

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™

