

Keyes Candidacy Disastrous for Illinois Republicans

Written by Rich Miller

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I have a lot of respect for Illinois Senate Republican Leader Frank Watson, but I think he's gone off his rocker. Watson strongly supports the candidacy of Alan Keyes for U.S. Senate in Illinois. One of his lieutenants, state Senator Dave Syverson (R-Rockford), was the guy who recruited Keyes in the first place, talked him up to the media, and then helped convince the GOP state central committee to offer the vacant Jack Ryan slot to him, over the objections of party chairperson Judy Baar Topinka.

Watson and Syverson believe that Keyes will help the GOP take back the Illinois Senate, or at least pick up some seats.

Keyes does have some positions that will please "red meat" conservatives and fire up the right-wing base. He is 100-percent pro-life, even in cases of rape and incest. He staunchly favors gun-owner rights. He is completely against gay rights. And he is forthrightly in favor of tort reform.

But can Keyes really help the Republicans win some state Senate seats?

The three Democratic seats that are most up for grabs are fairly conservative. The most conservative is probably Senator Gary Forby's deep-southern-Illinois district, although it does lean Democratic. The most Republican would be Senator John Sullivan's western-Illinois district, but that one seems pretty moderate. Then there's Senator Pat Welch's evenly divided district, which the Democrat has won year in and year out, even during the 1994 GOP landslide.

Democratic U.S. Senate nominee Barack Obama would have probably lost Senator Forby's district this November to a candidate like Jack Ryan (without the baggage). Obama's probably too liberal for those folks down yonder. He's a Chicagoan, and they don't like outsiders too much. And let's face it: He's also black, and that's not a region known for its openness to the ideas of racial harmony. Keyes might have some of the right ideas for Forby's district, but he, too, is an outsider, and he's also black. I just don't see how Keyes brings people to the polls down there.

Senator Sullivan defeated a centrist Republican two years ago who always watched her votes

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to make sure she was moderate enough for her district, and usually tried to win the American Federation of State, County, & Municipal Employees (AFSCME) endorsement, except in 2002, when AFSCME went with Sullivan. Keyes is probably too bombastic and over-the-top conservative for the region. He wants to do things such as privatize Social Security, and he opposes federal health programs (Medicare and Medicaid). The seniors are gonna be scared to death of this guy.

Senator Welch will win or lose on his own merits. He's not what you would call a vigorous campaigner and he's made some bad votes this past year, but his fate will probably not be determined by who is on the top of the ticket; his win in '94 proved that.

The Republicans need to pick up four seats to win the Senate majority, and the fourth is up in Lake County, where Democratic Senator Susan Garrett now looks almost unstoppable. Keyes will go over like a lead balloon in that moderate-to-liberal district. He'll hurt Garrett's Republican opponent, not help him.

Keyes is the Republican version of Al Sharpton, another arrogant blowhard and perennial loser with way-out-of-the-mainstream views.

Here's how Keyes describes himself on his own Web site: "capable of leading our country to widespread moral and political renewal, once all of America has a chance to see and hear, firsthand, his self-evident brilliance." Give me a break.

Keyes has run for office every four years since 1988 and has never won. His last race, for president, was in 2000. Illinois' U.S. Senate contest is right on schedule.

Not to mention that if Keyes has proved himself an extraordinary hypocrite because he slammed Hillary Clinton's New York Senate bid as a clear violation of federalist principles and said he would never do anything like that.

Keyes opposes affirmative action, yet it's clear he was wooed into the contest mostly because he would be a clear black alternative to Obama's liberalism. If that's not affirmative action, I'm not sure what is.

Keyes' candidacy is just plain wrong on many levels, but the worst reason could be the self-delusion that he could help win down-ballot races.

Rich Miller also publishes Capitol Fax, a daily political newsletter. He can be reached at (<http://www.capitolfax.com>).