



CAMPAIGN 2016:

Reformers seek to keep outside money from Ill. Senate race

Jennifer Yachnin, E&E reporter

Published: Thursday, November 19, 2015

Please agree to put a halt to the flood of outside ads -- or we'll be forced to flood your race with outside ads.

That's the message a super political action committee focused on campaign finance reform is leveling at candidates in the Illinois Senate race this cycle, as it launches an ad campaign asking campaigns to agree to curb third-party spending in the race.

CounterPAC announced yesterday that it will kick off a weeklong digital and television ad campaign, including spots on local CBS stations during the Chicago Bears NFL game on Sunday, targeting both Illinois Sen. Mark Kirk (R) and the leading Democrat seeking to unseat him, Rep. Tammy Duckworth.

"Both Mark Kirk and Tammy Duckworth have been outspoken about the trouble with elections that are dominated by super PACs -- so this is a chance for each of them to put their money where their mouth is," CounterPAC Executive Director Jay Costa said in a statement. "A simple pledge could erase outside money -- giving voters a race free of unlimited outside spending and offering a model of accountability for other races across the country."

Both ads highlight previous statements each candidate has made criticizing spending by PACs and outside groups, including Duckworth's **call** for campaign finance reform and Kirk's **suggestion** that outside groups could air ads "saying you strangle kittens."

"Senator, please don't make us do this: Mark Kirk, kitten killer," Advertisement a narrator states over a silhouette of a man appearing to strangle a cat.

"Seriously, Illinois needs a senator who works for voters, not special interests. So take the CounterPAC pledge to reject all outside money or you might just get more ads like this," the ad ends, with the image of a silhouette of a hand reaching for a cat.

Although Costa also called on another Democratic candidate, former Chicago Urban League President Andrea Zopp, to eschew outside spending in the race in an op-ed in the *Chicago Sun-Times* earlier this month, the group will not mention Zopp in its new digital or television spots. State Sen. Napoleon Harris, who is also competing for the Democratic nod, was also not mentioned in the group's campaign.

CounterPAC's efforts, which began in the 2012 cycle, are based on a pledge first popularized in the 2012 Massachusetts Senate battle between Democrat Elizabeth Warren and then-Sen. Scott Brown (R).

In that race, both Warren and Brown agreed to ask third-party groups to halt advertisements, with each campaign required to make a charitable contribution in the event of violations.

According to its website, CounterPAC waded into three contests in the last election cycle, urging then-West Virginia Rep. Nick Rahall (D), then-Alaska Sen. Mark Begich (D), Colorado Rep. Mike Coffman (R) and their opponents to adhere to a "no dark money" pledge that would limit spending from political nonprofits.

When Coffman's Democratic challenger accepted the pledge last year but the Republican refused, CounterPAC aired advertisements criticizing Coffman as "Dark Money Mike."

"Mike Coffman is enjoying the support of six-figure campaign ads funded by secret donors," stated a narrator in that **spot**. "The problem with secret donors is you just don't know who they are: Big tobacco? Russian oil billionaires? Too-big-to-jail Wall Street bankers? The owner of China's largest casino? We just don't know, and that's just how Mike Coffman wants it."

The contest for the Illinois seat is among the most competitive Senate races this cycle as Democrats look to a presidential cycle to help flip party control of the seat. Democrats need to pick up five Senate seats -- or four if the party retains the White House -- to gain majority control of the chamber next year.

Neither Duckworth's nor Kirk's campaign responded to requests for comment about whether the candidates would agree to the spending ban.

The Illinois Senate race is expected to be an expensive contest even without outside spending. Kirk reported \$3.6 million in the bank at the end of September, while Duckworth had \$2.8 million at that time.

Want to read more stories like this?

Click here to start a free trial to E&E -- the best way to track policy and markets.