2 candidates, 2 different directions for Illinois GOP
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SPRINGFIELD (AP) — Bill Brady and Mark Kirk, two Republicans running for top Illinois offices, sometimes seem to be running in different directions.

Kirk, the party's Senate candidate, questions the judgment of any public official who winds up not paying income taxes. That category includes Kirk's Democratic opponent but also Brady, the GOP nominee for governor.

Kirk also argues that all candidates for state office should make their tax returns public. Brady released his returns reluctantly, and his running mate steadfastly refuses to let voters see his taxes.

Then there are policy differences.

Kirk, a member of Congress, voted for "cap-and-trade" environmental legislation (but now opposes it), supports abortion rights and stem-cell research and has backed some gun control measures.

Brady is far more conservative. The Bloomington state senator believes humans don't contribute to global warming, opposes abortion even in cases of rape and incest and rejects gun control.

John Frendreis, a political science professor at Loyola University in Chicago, said voters may find the disagreements confusing, but Kirk is mostly concerned about what's best for his Senate campaign.

"How the governor's race turns out is of secondary interest to him," Frendreis said.

He said the conflicting messages disrupt Republican efforts to run a unified campaign and make the election a broad referendum on Republicans versus Democrats.

Of course, Brady and Kirk agree on many fundamental issues, such as the need to rein in government spending or the damage that Democrats, particularly former Gov. Rod Blagojevich, have done to Illinois.

And Democrats have splits of their own.

Quinn's campaign mocked Brady for not paying income taxes last year, only to find out that Senate nominee Alexi Giannoulias is in the same position. Asked about the issue Wednesday, Quinn called it "a fundamental principle" that public officials should pay taxes.

But the two Democrats agree on most other policy issues.
Kirk, his campaign shaken by revelations that he exaggerated his military accomplishments, has tried to hit back at Giannoulias.

Before Giannoulias released his tax returns and federal financial disclosure forms, Kirk publicly criticized Giannoulias, asking what he was hiding. That was a bit awkward since Brady initially refused to release his returns and wound up only letting reporters look them over for a few hours. The GOP's candidate for lieutenant governor, Jason Plummer, still won't release his returns.

Things grew more complicated when Giannoulias' returns showed that because of financial problems at his family bank, he did not owe any income taxes for last year. Giannoulias made money as state treasurer but the bank losses wiped that out and more, entitling him to a refund of nearly $30,000. Giannoulias says he'll donate the refund to charity.

Kirk jumped on the news, accusing Giannoulias of shirking his responsibilities. He said Giannoulias should at least pay taxes on his government salary, particularly when Giannoulias supports increasing the Illinois income tax.

He didn't change his tune when reminded that his fellow Republican, Brady, also wound up owing no taxes last year because of business losses.

"If you are depending on a salary paid by taxpayers you ought to pay tax," Kirk said.

The Kirk and Brady campaigns have dismissed the differences and focused on where the candidates agree.

"They are lined up on the important issues facing families today: a job, the taxes they pay to a broken-down government and a corrupt government system. And that's what people are talking about," said Brady spokeswoman Patty Schuh.