

Atlanta, Sept 9 (AP) - First lady Michelle Obama debuted on the 2014 campaign trail Monday in Georgia, where Senate candidate Michelle Nunn is working to pick up a key seat for Democrats. The open Senate seat is a critical battleground in the national fight for control of the Senate, in which Republicans must gain six seats to win the majority. Republican businessman David Perdue has relentlessly tried to tie Nunn to President Barack Obama, who did not win Georgia in 2008 or 2012.

Mrs. Obama made the trip to boost voter turnout for Nunn among independents, minority and women voters. She told a large crowd gathered in a recreation center just steps from the Martin Luther King Jr. Historic Site in Atlanta that Nunn and Jason Carter, a Democrat running for governor, can win in November if more Democrats who voted in 2008 and 2012 cast ballots this year.

"Barack won because record numbers of women and minorities and young people showed up to vote. But then when the midterms came along and too many of our folks tuned out," Mrs. Obama said. "That's what folks on the other side are counting on because when you stay home, they win."

During her speech, Mrs. Obama highlighted her husband's accomplishments while also warning the crowd what the last two years of his presidency would look like if Republicans captured the Senate.

"Frankly if we lose these midterm elections, it's going to be a whole lot harder to finish what we've started," she said. "Things will be even worse in Washington. Instead of leaders coming together on behalf of hard-working families, we'll just see more conflict and more obstruction, more lawsuits and talk about impeachment, more votes to repeal the Affordable Care Act or even shut the government down."

On the campaign trail, Democrats running for the Senate in Republican-leaning states like Georgia, Kentucky and West Virginia have had to walk a fine line in demonstrating their independence to woo moderates while also energizing a base that remains supportive of the president's agenda. And that's where Mrs. Obama comes in.

"During the 2012 campaign, First lady Michelle Obama was more popular in some states than her husband," said Tharon Johnson, a Democratic strategist who led Obama's re-election campaign in the South. "She generates an enormous amount of support from women and will bring the topic of public education to the forefront of campaigns in Georgia."

To counter the Republicans' efforts, Nunn and other vulnerable Democrats are going against the president on issues like the proposed Keystone XL oil pipeline from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico and carbon emissions. Nunn, the daughter of former Democratic Sen. Sam Nunn, won't talk about how she would have voted on Obama's signature health care law, sticking instead to what she'd change about it.

"While Michelle Nunn is trying to distance herself from President Obama and Washington Democrats publicly, she clearly has no problem raising money from them directly on the taxpayers' dime in order to deceive Georgians about her true allegiance to President Obama and (Senate Majority Leader) Harry Reid," said Perdue's spokeswoman, Megan Whittemore. Mrs. Obama's visit was designed to pump up a voter registration effort led by the state party. Georgia Democrats have been hoping that an increase in out-of-state residents and a growing minority population would help them regain power after Republicans claimed every statewide office in 2010.

Democrats are working to reach an estimated 800,000 eligible voters who are black, Hispanic and Asian that for one reason or another are not registered to vote.