

Illinois governor gaining reputation as indecisive

By CHRISTOPHER WILLIS (AP) – 15 hours ago



Map

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. — First, Gov. Pat Quinn demanded that the University of Illinois board of trustees resign over an admissions scandal. Then he gave them time to think it over. Then he set a deadline. Then he pushed back the deadline.

Weeks later, the issue is still unresolved.

The scandal is the latest situation adding to the Democratic governor's reputation of being indecisive since he took over in January from Gov. Rod Blagojevich, who was ousted after his arrest on federal corruption charges.

His major challenger in February's primary election, Comptroller Daniel Hynes, already is making an issue of Quinn's leadership abilities. Republican candidates are criticizing him, too.

And House Speaker Michael Madigan, D-Chicago, ended the legislative session with a news conference to complain that Quinn flip-flopped on the budget, a public works program, borrowing money and more.

Quinn rejects the idea that he's indecisive. Instead, he says, he's flexible enough to listen to other people's ideas and patient enough not to act rashly.

Take the University of Illinois, for instance, where officials sometimes allowed clout and political influence to affect admission decisions. Quinn appointed a commission to investigate, and it recommended on Aug. 6 that the university's trustees step down.

The governor took some time to review the recommendations, then asked for the trustees' resignations. Since then, he has repeatedly delayed action on removing the trustees as more and more have resigned voluntarily.

"You have to let the process play itself out," Quinn said recently. "You know, in baseball there's nine innings. We're not in the ninth inning yet."

Two trustees refuse to step aside. Quinn initially said he would take action last week. Then he changed that to Monday but wound up postponing a decision. On Tuesday, he said he would announce his plans Wednesday.

Hynes accuses Quinn of mishandling the admissions scandal.

"The people of Illinois have a right to be angry as to how and why this chaotic situation has dragged on so long," Hynes said in a news release. "The entire summer has gone by without a resolution, and now matters only seem to be accelerating further off the rails. The governor has taken a bad situation and made it worse."

Quinn shot back Tuesday: "This is not a time for politics from people on the sidelines. This is a time to straighten out our state university so all of us can hold our heads up high."

The admissions scandal is hardly the only issue where Quinn has been accused of dithering and flip-flopping:

_ He repeatedly warned that a bare-bones budget approved by lawmakers would force him to slash vital social services. Then he announced that he would never slash services that deeply.

_ He told legislative leaders that he would not link his approval of a huge public works program to getting the budget he wanted. Then he refused to approve the construction program until the budget was settled.

_ He testified in favor of ethics legislation that critics said was too soft, but now he hints that he'll use his amendatory veto powers to rewrite the bill.

_ He initially supported a special election to fill President Barack Obama's former U.S. Senate seat, then opposed the idea.

"These are all flip-flops," Madigan said in June. "They are not helpful to his credibility. They are not helpful to working with a large group of people as you have in the Legislature."

Quinn, however, argues that most of those actions amount to maneuvering over details as he focuses on the big picture — getting a tax increase to balance the budget, for instance, or toughening Illinois ethics laws.

Christopher Mooney, a political science professor at the University of Illinois at Springfield, said Quinn risks weakening himself by being seen as indecisive. Lawmakers, for instance, are less likely to concede to him in negotiations if they think he'll fold soon.

But Mooney doubts the average voter pays much attention to the kinds of issues on which Quinn has been accused of flip-flopping. He said they're not big, fundamental issues, such as presidential candidate John Kerry's 2004 statement that he voted for war funding before he voted against it.

Still, Quinn's would-be opponents hope voters pick up on the theme.

"I think his resolve is certainly in question," said Sen. Matt Murphy of Palatine, who plans to seek the Republican nomination for governor. "The people have a pretty good innate sense of

