

Awaiting official tally, Brady turns attention to general election, Quinn

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By KURT ERICKSON - H&R Springfield Bureau Chief | Posted: Saturday, February 6, 2010 3:00 am | No Comments Posted

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SPRINGFIELD - Although the outcome of the Republican race for governor remains in flux, state Sen. Bill Brady headed out on the campaign trail Friday.

With just a 406-vote lead over his closest rival, Kirk Dillard of Hinsdale, Brady had taken a short break from campaigning Thursday to check on his Bloomington real estate business and rest his vocal chords.

For now, Brady and Dillard are waiting for final ballots to roll in from absentee and provisional voters. If an official count in March shows the two still neck and neck, a recount process could be launched, forcing an even longer delay in determining who will represent the GOP in November.

That's not stopping Brady from plotting his run against Quinn.

In an interview, Brady chuckled when asked how a downstate conservative would fare in the Democratic bastion of Chicago. He said he's heard that question more than once since a late surge put him at the top of the GOP primary race late Tuesday night.

His strategy: Downplay social issues such as abortion and guns and get voters to focus on fiscal matters.

"I'm pro-life, and I believe in the Second Amendment, but our focus is going to be what's most on people's minds," Brady said. "This is all about taxes and the economy and jobs."

"Gov. Quinn wants to increase your taxes by half, if not double them, and I'm not going to do that," he said.

Chris Mooney, a political scientist at the University of Illinois at Springfield, said Brady is trying to define himself before Quinn gets a chance.

"As a relatively unknown quantity, he is open to be defined," Mooney said. "The Quinn camp will try to paint him as this right-wing guy."

"It's a matter of who wins that 'defining' war," Mooney added.

The last downstate candidate to run for governor was Democrat Glenn Poshard, who narrowly lost in 1998 to Republican George Ryan.

Poshard ran a similar primary campaign to Brady's, using downstate as his base to defeat three Chicago-area candidates.

But once the general election starts, the equation changes, said Poshard, who is now president of Southern Illinois University.

"Just because you win the primary with a huge plurality downstate, that doesn't mean you're going to rack up huge numbers in the general election," Poshard said.

Although the two come from different parties, Poshard and Brady share conservative views on guns and abortion.

Poshard, however, said he moderated his position on gun control during that election because the issues facing Chicago voters, where handgun violence is a threat to residents, are different from downstate.

"Illinois is one state, but it's two different regions," Poshard said. "In the general election, you can't just speak to your base. You have to speak to everyone."

Brady said his task will be to keep the voters focused on the contrasts between him and Quinn, rather than on his conservative leanings.

"Quinn obviously thinks it's positive to raise taxes or he wouldn't be doing it. I think it's negative," Brady said.

Brady said his success Tuesday started more than six years ago, when he first began running for governor in the 2006 Republican primary, a race in which he finished third.

"We built a grass-roots organization that we knew would give us credibility statewide," Brady said.

As the 2010 race took shape, money was tight with six people in the race. His team decided that an early round of negative ads by his opponents, combined with the holiday season, would keep Republican voters undecided for a longer period of time.

With less money than some of his opponents, he saved his cash for an advertising blitz that ran in the final week of the campaign.

"We just had to take our shot at the end," Brady said.

kurt.erickson@lee.net|789-0865