

Quinn and LaHood's worlds about to be rocked

Engraved memorial to honor pair's work on Illinois River projects and protection

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PEORIA —

Gov. Pat Quinn and U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood will be honored in October for their bipartisan leadership in advancing restoration and protection efforts of the Illinois River.

But is it too soon to honor a sitting governor in Illinois with a permanent marker? One longtime political observer believes so.

"It's unusual to do this for a sitting governor," said Kent Redfield, professor emeritus of political science at the University of Illinois at Springfield. "It's not a huge deal, but it will strike some people as trying to curry favor with someone who has power over budgets and signs legislation."

Marlena Jentz, a spokeswoman for the governor, responded by saying Quinn is "honored and humbled" to receive the award with LaHood.

"The governor will remain a steward for the environment and continue to fight for green causes across the state of Illinois," she said.

Bob Frazee, natural resource educator with the University of Illinois Extension and co-chairman of the 12th biennial Conference on the Management of the Illinois River System, said the honor is for Quinn's and LaHood's involvement with river-related issues.

Frazee said enough money has been raised to commemorate the duo with an inscribed rock near the Gateway Fountain on the Peoria riverfront, although he declined to say how much the rock would cost. The City Council will vote Tuesday whether to allow the rock to be located on the riverfront.

"We felt we want to do something to recognize this bipartisanship," Frazee said. "They have done more with the Illinois River than any politicians you can look at. That's what it really boils down to."

The rock will be unveiled on Oct. 20. Quinn is expected to attend the ceremony, but it's unsure whether LaHood can be there.

The rock is being paid for from conference registration fees by participants who attended previous conferences, as well as those who will be in Peoria during the October event. The three-day conference will be held at the Hotel Pere Marquette.

The 4 1/2 foot-tall rock will have the conference logo and both Quinn and LaHood's names engraved along with the inscription, "In Recognition of their Bipartisan Efforts to Protect and Enhance the Illinois River."

Frazee said Quinn and LaHood have done a lot of work together in getting funding for the "mud to parks" dredging project and the multimillion-dollar construction of a 21-acre island north of the McClugage Bridge, among other things.

Quinn, who replaced ousted Gov. Rod Blagojevich in January, took charge of the Illinois River Coordinating Council when he was lieutenant governor. He has been highly regarded by local officials for his work in that capacity, with more than one official commenting that river causes have "no bigger friend" than Quinn.

Redfield, though, believes there is a "risk" to placing permanent memorials for governors before they leave office.

"If someone would have dedicated a permanent marker for George Ryan during the second year of his administration, they might be trying to remove that marker right now," he said.

State Sen. Dale Risinger, R-Peoria, said the Quinn marker doesn't cause him concerns.

"Normally, it would not be the governor who does the work with the (river council)," Risinger said. "But Quinn as lieutenant governor got thrown into the governorship with the removal of (Rod) Blagojevich. There isn't a lieutenant governor now. Quinn wears both hats right now."