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GOP Candidates for Illinois Governor Meet in Forum

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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CHICAGO (AP) -- Republicans don't hold a single statewide elected office in Illinois, but the crowded field of GOP candidates for governor wants to change that by pointing out their differences with Democrats.

A major point of contention is taxes, and five of the Republicans running said Wednesday that Illinois' money troubles can be fixed without raising taxes.

"I will not raise taxes and I won't allow it to be done," state Sen. Bill Brady of Bloomington said during a Republican candidate forum at the Union League Club of Chicago.

Fellow state Sen. Kirk Dillard, public relations consultant Dan Proft, DuPage County Board Chairman Bob Schillerstrom and businessman Adam Andrzejewski also attended and agreed raising taxes was a wrongheaded idea.

Democratic primary opponents Gov. [Pat Quinn](#) and Comptroller Dan Hynes have said the state needs the extra money that an income tax increase would generate.

Quinn already proposed raising the income tax to try to help close a more than \$11 billion budget hole. But lawmakers didn't go for it and instead passed a budget that relies on borrowing money, delaying payment of state bills and promises to cut more spending as the year goes on.

Republican candidates offered some ideas during the forum about how they would tackle the state's budget problems without raising taxes. Dillard wants to save money by cracking down on [Medicaid](#) fraud, Proft would push for statutory spending caps, Schillerstrom wants changes in the pension system and Andrzejewski promised to cut ineffective state agencies.

The GOP believes it has a shot at the governor's mansion in the wake of the scandals surrounding ousted Gov. [Rod Blagojevich](#). Lawmakers removed him from office in January after his arrest on federal corruption charges. He has pleaded not guilty and is expected to stand trial next year.

While the five Republican candidates tackled questions about education, abortion and government reform, two of the biggest names looming in the GOP primary race were missing from the event: former Illinois GOP chairman Andy McKenna and former Illinois Attorney General Jim Ryan.

McKenna spokesman Lance Trover said the candidate had a prior commitment.

Ryan, who lost to Blagojevich in the 2002 governor's race, has not officially declared his candidacy but is

"strongly inclined to run," spokesman Dan Curry said.

Ryan's entry into the race could help overcome a potential weakness in the Republican field, said Chris Mooney, a political science professor at the [University of Illinois](#) at Springfield.

"There are no statewide-elected or former statewide-elected officials in the field," he said.

But the other candidates at the forum brushed off any impact Ryan, who now teaches at Benedictine University in Lisle, might have on the race.

"I don't care who's in the race," Dillard said.

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