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Brady has bunch of work to do to win, experts say

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March 16, 2010

BY JOE BIESK

State Sen. Bill Brady squeaked by last month's six-way Republican gubernatorial primary as a relatively unknown statewide commodity known - if at all - for his downstate roots.

The strategy was successful; after all, he won. But now, experts say, Brady should be on to a new mission of endearing himself to upstate voters.

"He's an unknown factor," said Kent Redfield, a political scientist at the University of Illinois at Springfield.

Brady, of Bloomington, garnered much of his support in last month's primary without help from Republican voters from in and around Chicago. His victory in the Feb. 2 election over second-place state Sen. Kirk Dillard was by fewer than 200 votes statewide.

Brady notched 1,839 votes in Chicago, and did not score a single electoral victory in any Cook County township. And he tallied just 3,042 of the 45,056 Republican votes cast in Will County.

Running as the "non-Chicago" candidate in the primary made sense because it helped Brady set himself apart, said Matt Streb, an associate political science professor at Northern Illinois University. Now he'll need Chicago and collar-county voters if he wants to win in November, Streb said.

"For a lot of people in this area, there's still a question mark about who he is and what does he stand for," Streb said. "I don't think people in this area really thoroughly digested his voting record and his position on issues."

That leaves the door open for Gov. Pat Quinn, Brady's opponent, and other Democrats to try to define Brady, Redfield said. Given Brady's conservative credentials - he opposes gay marriage and abortion and supports school prayer - Democrats are likely to paint Brady as an extremist, Redfield said.

Brady has to temper that potential onslaught and keep the discussion on jobs, Redfield said.

Earlier this month, Quinn said there was "a Grand Canyon of difference" between him and Brady.

Voters will care more about jobs and the economy than about any social issues, state Rep. Renee Kosel (R-New Lenox) said.

"I don't think that we've ever had more of a choice in how this state is going to move than we have in this gubernatorial race," Kosel said. "There is a dramatic difference in the way that these two people want to run this state."

On Sunday, Brady kicked off his Chicago-area campaign with a rally in Addison. On Monday his campaign announced Brady would be holding a "listening tour" where he'll talk with citizens about their concerns.

Stops are planned for the south suburbs, but a date has not been determined, spokeswoman Jaime Elich said.

Dick Kavanagh, chairman of the Will County Republican Party, said Brady didn't have the money to compete with his northern opponents in the primary. But that's likely to change in the fall, Kavanagh said.

"He needs to spend a fair amount of time in the Chicago metropolitan area," Kavanagh said. "He intends to do that, and I think by doing that, he will definitely pick up a tremendous amount of support."

Part of Brady's appeal is that he's "a clean break from the Chicago-style politics of the past," Elich said. Brady is counting on voters to draw toward him in part because he's from downstate, she said.

"He will be a governor for all of Illinois and he cares very much about Chicago," Elich said. "What made him stand out was that he wasn't a part of the Chicago machine."

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