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Gov. Quinn not living in mansion as promised

Despite vowing to live in taxpayer-funded house, he's only had sporadic stays

By Monique Garcia, Tribune reporter

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Gov. Pat Quinn had been in office only a few hours last year when he vowed to do something his impeached predecessor did not — live in the Executive Mansion in Springfield.

"It's going to get a good workout this year," Quinn told reporters at his first news conference as governor, dubbing the 155-year-old mansion "the people's house."

But a Tribune analysis of his official travel schedule shows that Quinn stays at the ornate, taxpayer-funded house only sporadically. During his first year in office, Quinn slept there 55 nights, mostly while lawmakers were in session. He didn't spend more than three consecutive nights in the executive mansion.



On a handful of occasions, Quinn took a state plane to Springfield during the day, only to fly back to Chicago the same night. Among these cases were trips to attend a campaign fundraiser and his aunt's funeral. Quinn defended the funeral round trip as an appropriate use of taxpayer money because he was honoring a woman who was a "citizen of Illinois for eight decades."

Quinn's use of the state plane for day trips to Springfield pales in comparison to ex- Gov. Rod Blagojevich, who detested the Capitol and used the plane as a commuter perk. But as Quinn runs for election, his decision not to live in the mansion belies the populist image that he's made one of his top political selling points.

"It's a symbolic thing, and for Quinn, a public pronouncement thing," said Christopher Mooney, a political science professor at the University of Illinois- Springfield. "There's some financial aspect, but it's small. It's mostly symbolic of the extent to which a governor is embracing state government."

Blagojevich's failure to live in the mansion rankled taxpayers who expect their governor to live in the house they pay around \$500,000 a year to keep open. Now more than a year into his tenure, Quinn has added a caveat when discussing where he lives.

"The governor lives in the mansion in my opinion," Quinn told the Tribune in a recent interview. "I'm the governor, it's the seat of our government, and whenever I'm in Springfield, that's where I live. If I have to be somewhere else to do something for the people, then I've got to live elsewhere."

That comment would explain why at some appearances in Chicago, Quinn tells the crowd he lives on Chicago's West Side, "the best side." When he's been in Springfield, he has called the capital home.

Sen. Bill Brady, a Bloomington Republican running for governor against Quinn, has said he and his wife, Nancy, would live in the mansion full time if he's elected.

"The business of the state is rooted in Springfield. In order to effectively manage the affairs of the state of Illinois, the governor must have a strong presence in the capital city," said Brady spokeswoman Jaime Elich.

Quinn is not alone in using the governor's mansion as more of a hotel than a home. In the last quarter century, Republican Jim Edgar is the lone chief executive who lived there full time. Republicans Jim Thompson and George Ryan split their time between the mansion and their respective homes in Chicago and Kankakee. Blagojevich wanted to raise his daughters on the North Side, and then-first lady Patti Blagojevich complained about being allergic to the mansion's carpeted floors.

That led to Blagojevich racking up tens of thousands of dollars in taxpayer money making same-day round trips between Chicago and the capital. Quinn hasn't made as many day trips, but he's had some notable ones.

On June 29, Quinn met with Mayor Richard Daley in Chicago before flying to Springfield to huddle with Democratic legislative leaders. Quinn was there for just over two hours before flying back to Chicago, where he hosted an evening campaign fundraiser at the downtown Hyatt.

Quinn said his use of the plane was appropriate and he did not make the round trip because of the fundraiser, but because he planned to attend the annual Rainbow/PUSH meeting in Chicago the following morning.

"I had an event, but I had already scheduled Rainbow/PUSH the next morning," Quinn said.

On Oct. 10, Quinn flew from Chicago in the afternoon to host a Springfield reception for his former Northwestern University law classmates, then flew back to Chicago about five hours later. On Dec. 19, Quinn flew to Springfield to host a holiday open house and staff party before returning to Chicago a few hours later.

Quinn said hosting receptions and open houses is part of his effort "to have an open government" by welcoming citizens to the mansion. He said he flew to Chicago after the reception with his classmates to attend a charity event that was not listed on his schedule.

"My view is the governor's got to go where the people need him," Quinn said.

Cindi Canary, executive director of the Illinois Campaign for Political Reform, said the trips show the need for clear guidelines on what constitutes appropriate use of state planes. On one hand, she said, Illinois is a very large state and the governor will need to travel. "The real question is, is this above and beyond what's necessary?" Canary said.

Quinn defends his use of the plane and the mansion. He said he has unpacked clothing and family photos. He frequently holds breakfast and dinner meetings there with lawmakers. And he has hosted an Easter egg hunt, handed out Halloween candy to children and had his family over for Thanksgiving.

"My extended family, we added to the tourism of Springfield a great deal," Quinn said. "In all my time as governor, I respect the house. We've had many events to bring people into the mansion."

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