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Gov Quinn: Limit Politics In Primaries

July 13, 2010

By Benjamin Yount Illinois Statehouse News

SPRINGFIELD – Could Illinois' party-dominated primaries go the way of straight-party voting? Gov. [Pat Quinn](#) wants them to.

The governor on Tuesday used an amendatory veto to change a piece of legislation to create a much more open primary.

Voters would still have to choose between Republicans or Democrats, but Quinn's plan would let them do that in the voting booth. Right now anyone who votes in the primary has to pull a party ballot from election workers.

The governor said his open primary would be a win for voters, and a loss for the political bosses who want to control elections.

["Illinois' not about professional politicians...We need to use a crowbar to open up the process and let people vote in a primary without disclosure of their party," said Quinn.](#)

Quinn did not name any names. Critics immediately jumped on the governor's move as a political ploy or phony populism. But University of Illinois at Springfield professor and former Illinois elections' chief Ron Michaelson said he doesn't think it's phony.

["This is the reformer in the governor coming out. These are the kind of issues that Pat Quinn for 30 years has been promoting here in Illinois...But the way he has done what he has done is not going to go down well in Illinois."](#)

Michaelson said Quinn's order to move away from party-dominated primaries is a "monumental" shift in the state's political system.

Both state lawmakers and local political party leaders agree.

[State Rep Mike Tryon](#), R-Crystal Lake, said the governor's plan would do more to influence elections in Illinois than anything legislators have done in years.

["\[An open primary\] will triple the cost of an election. Because now instead of worrying about getting your own voters out in a primary, you're now going to have to mail and campaign to the other party. And the other party may not have pure intentions."](#)

Tryon, who is also the head of the [McHenry County Republican Party](#), said political operatives could use an open primary to thin out the competition.

["You're going to have Democrats and Republicans, and libertarians and Green party \[voters\] crossing into each others primary saying I'm going to vote against](#)

this guy or I'm going to vote for this guy so this guy doesn't get the nomination. So our guy has a better chance."

Former [Bureau County Democratic party](#) boss and long time [State Rep Frank Mautino](#), D-Spring Valley, said that's called the "bozo effect." And while Mautino said that could happen in an open primary, he does not want to change the system because the current two party structure works.

"To me the strength of the two party system is that as Democrats we have some beliefs or normal alliances that allow us to elect our strongest candidate in an orderly fashion. And it'd probably be the same for the Republicans. "

[Illinois Republican Party Chairman Pat Brady](#) said he thinks an open primary might help Republicans. He thinks taking away patronage might allow some voters to vote their conscious and not vote to keep their jobs.

But Brady's focus seemed to be on bashing Quinn.

"This should be so far down on the list of priorities for Gov. Quinn right now I don't know why he's doing this," said Brady.

UIS' Michaelson said with the election coming this fall, he can think of some reasons for Quinn to propose the idea.

"It's going to please those who, for many years, have wanted to change our primary election system. On the other hand it's going to displease members from both parties. The party loyalists, the party chieftains."

As current and former party chieftains, both Tryon and Mautino said they do not believe Quinn's proposal will ever become law. Both expect the General Assembly to kill the amendatory veto sometime this fall.

That is almost a certainty according to the changed plan's original author [State Sen. Martin Sandoval](#), D-Cicero. He said Tuesday that he has already sent word to

Senate President John Cullerton and House Speaker Michael Madigan, both Chicago Democrats, that he intends to override Quinn's changes.

["He has a right, as the executive of the state, to \[change the proposal\]. But I will consider filling a motion to override the veto and let the legislature debate what is now a wildly popular concept."](#)

A spokesman for the House Speaker said Quinn's veto is under review.

Lawmakers are not scheduled to return to Springfield to deal with the governor's veto until after the November election.

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