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## Nice guys finish last

Pat Quinn tries to win votes by being honest about bad news

BY PATRICK YEAGLE



governor Rod Blagojevich in January 2009, inheriting along with the governorship a crushing state debt and widespread public dissatisfaction with state government. Now, the longtime outsider Democrat is tasked with overcoming misplaced public anger about state funding cuts and an anti-tax fever that threatens to push Illinois into the waiting arms of a Republican. These factors are likely to give him plenty of steam to blow off at the gym before the Nov. 2 general election.

Patrick J. Quinn, 61, first ambled onto Illinois' political scene in 1973 as a staffer for then-governor Dan Walker. After Walker lost the 1976 Democratic primary for governor, Quinn began a series of petition drives, collecting signatures to increase the power of public referendums, give citizens the power to recall elected officials, stop legislators from taking their full salaries on their first day, and reduce the size of the state House of Representatives from 177 to 118. The latter two measures passed, giving Quinn an image as a populist reformer to some and a troublemaker to others. The causes to which he clung decades ago still seem relevant, however, and a new constitutional amendment to allow citizens to recall the governor will appear on the same ballot that asks voters whether Quinn deserves a full term.

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"When he won the 1990 Democratic primary for state treasurer, there was a lot of apprehension among politicians and curiosity among reporters as to whether Pat Quinn would behave himself on a statewide ticket," Wheeler says. "To his credit, he did behave himself, and I think he did a good job as treasurer."

Quinn served as state treasurer from 1991 to 1995, and lost his bid for secretary of state in 1994. Before holding statewide office, he served as commissioner of the Cook County Board of Tax Appeals from 1982 to 1987, though he was fired by then-mayor Harold Washington. Asked why he wants another crack at governing the state, Quinn says he wants to help people.



that Brady didn't pay any income taxes the last two years, Miller says.

"There's an old saying: 'My candidate may be an asshole, but I'm going to make your candidate into more of an asshole,'" Miller says. "Pat Quinn needs to use ethics to paint Brady as

When he's not governing, one might find Gov. Pat Quinn blowing off steam while shooting some hoops at the Fenwick High School gym in Chicago – the same school he attended as a young man and where his youngest brother now coaches basketball.

"Sometimes I'll have her (a staffer) come to the gym with me, and I'll be shooting, and she'll be taking notes," Quinn says, joking that he is a man with two full-time jobs: running for governor and actually governing.

"Since January of last year, it's been the busiest time of my life," Quinn says between bites of roasted pork chop while sitting in the Commodities Pavilion at the Illinois State Fair. He says he likes to relax by reading, going to movies and taking walks to meet new people.

"I do have a life outside of politics," he says, "but you have to put it in perspective; we have some serious challenges for our state."

After about 40 years in Illinois politics, Quinn knows a thing or two about challenges.

Formerly the lieutenant governor, Quinn succeeded ousted Governor Blagojevich in January 2009, inheriting along with the governorship a crushing state debt and widespread public dissatisfaction with state government. Now, the longtime outsider Democrat is tasked with overcoming misplaced public anger about state funding cuts and an anti-tax fever that threatens to push Illinois into the waiting arms of a Republican. These factors are likely to give him plenty of steam to blow off at the gym before the Nov. 2 general election.

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"I believe in social justice, and I think the governor of Illinois can do a lot to help people have better lives," he says. "Whether it's health care, education, helping veterans, I think it's important to have a mission of social justice."

Quinn says his campaign is focused on jobs, education and rebuilding Illinois' infrastructure. His \$31 billion "Illinois Jobs Now!" capital plan hopes to stimulate the state's economy and create 439,000 jobs, though paying for the plan relies on uncertain federal funds, higher taxes on things like alcohol, candy and driver fees, and a video gambling scheme that has yet to even collect enthusiasm, much less the \$300 million Quinn projected [see article page 10].

Rich Miller, a journalist with 20 years of experience covering Illinois politics whose column appears weekly in Illinois Times, says Quinn's campaign lacks a unified theme around which voters can rally. Miller says Quinn should have a campaign message that focuses on the economy, while simultaneously hammering his Republican opponent, state Sen. Bill Brady of Bloomington. Quinn could paint Brady as out-of-touch because of Brady's past votes on issues like the minimum wage and the fact

another Rod (Blagojevich). ... That hasn't been done."

Miller says that Quinn also hasn't defined himself as governor, which he needs to do before Brady does it for him. Former state treasurer Judy Baar Topinka got defined as "the crazy old aunt" by Blagojevich when Topinka ran against Blagojevich for governor in 2006, Miller recalls, and that cost her the election.

"When you think of Pat Quinn, what do you think?" Miller asks. "See, you can't think of anything. That's the problem. During a campaign, you've got to be able to say, 'What do you think about this guy?' ... He doesn't know who he is. Quinn was an outsider, but he didn't govern as one; instead he's kind of a failed hybrid, and he has squandered the opportunity to at least appear as someone who puts the people first."

Charlie Wheeler says Quinn didn't seem prepared to govern when he took over after Blagojevich. Wheeler explains that Speaker of the House Michael Madigan sent a list of talking points on impeachment to House members the summer before Blagojevich was removed from office, but Quinn didn't seem to take the hint.

"If I were Pat Quinn, I would have been putting together a replacement government to be ready to go when Blagojevich was gone," Wheeler says. "He's the governor now, but he hasn't gotten past the mindset of being the outsider trying to rally the people to all these good causes."

Quinn plays the role of populist quite well. At every opportunity, he reminds journalists, voters and anyone who will listen that he's working "for the people of Illinois" by calling for an income tax increase meant to prevent massive cuts to social services and education, even though the increase itself would be unpopular. He favors making party affiliations of primary voters secret, adopting a graduated income tax and several other causes that favor voters over politicians and the disadvantaged over the powerful. Talking one-on-one, he is personable and gracious, flashing a genuine smile to voters who interrupt his sentences to ask for a picture with him at the State Fair. And despite his high achievements, he has retained a down-to-earth style that fits his everyman image. His voting address in western Chicago is a modest, nondescript two-story brick house with only one bathroom. When he first ascended to the governorship, he simply scratched out the "Lieutenant" on his business cards when handing them out.



Charlie Wheeler says he was very skeptical about Quinn's motives as a reformer when Wheeler first began observing Quinn decades ago.

"I thought his goody-two-shoes political persona was just to further his own ends," Wheeler says. "But when he became lieutenant governor, the stuff he did for veterans – going to the funerals of soldiers killed in duty and all that, without trying to maximize media exposure – impressed the hell out of me. I began to give him more credit as someone whose heart is in the right place."

Even Rich Miller, who has little faith in Quinn's ability to retain his office, gives the governor high marks for sincerity.

"Knowing him over the years and getting to know him a lot better now, he really is a decent man," Miller says of Quinn. "He wants to do right very badly; the problem is he does it very badly."

If elected for a second term, Quinn says he would continue to push for a one percentage point income tax "surcharge" that would go toward education. He also wants to reduce the state's

reliance on property taxes to fund education, instead using income tax revenue.

"We should cut property taxes, which aren't based on ability to pay," Quinn says. "I've got the guts to do it. I've seen firsthand the effect property taxes can have on families. ... We have to invest in education. If we don't, we'll regret it for decades to come. Jobs follow brainpower, so we have to have smart people from birth on."

Quinn also favors expanding high-speed broadband Internet to rural areas, extending marriage and other rights to gay and lesbian couples and establishing a public option for health insurance. To deal with the state's burgeoning prison population, Quinn wants more reasonable sentencing, boot camps and more job training to keep inmates from returning to prison. He also cites a commitment to the environment with green jobs and his plans to court developers of wind power, ethanol, biodiesel and cleaner coal. No one – not even Green Party candidate Rich Whitney – is going to "out-green" Pat Quinn, the governor says matter-of-factly.

Despite Quinn's populist appeal, one recent opinion poll shows bad news for the governor. An Aug. 18 poll by Public Policy Polling says Quinn's popularity among likely voters trails Brady's by nine percentage points – 30 to 39 respectively. The same poll showed that only 40 percent of Democrats approve of the job Quinn is doing as governor and more than a quarter disapprove, while only 17 percent of independent voters approve and 60 percent disapprove. Among African Americans, traditionally a strong Democratic voting bloc in Chicago, Quinn has only 22 percent approval. Quinn's fundraising also lags behind Brady's, with Quinn holding about \$1.6 million in the bank to Brady's \$2.3 million.



However, Charlie Wheeler says Quinn isn't beaten yet.

"Who knows what will happen between now and then?" Wheeler says. "Illinois is still basically a Democrat state. The poll results don't say folks are going over to the Tea Party. It just says that Democrats are crying in their beer. Pragmatic people know they have to work at the grassroots level to identify voters and get them to the polls."

Because of an estimated \$9.9 billion revenue shortfall and in lieu of his proposed one percentage point increase to the income tax, the governor has made widespread, unpopular cuts to education, social programs and health care — areas that rely heavily on state funding and comprise most of the state's budget. Quinn deals with an outdated tax system in which revenue growth has not kept pace with inflation, and that means the state's ever-growing responsibilities are paid for with dollars of ever-decreasing value. Incidentally, the bipartisan Center for Tax and Budget Accountability says Illinois is one of the lowest-spending, lowest-taxing states in the nation. Sen. Brady, meanwhile, decries the evils of tax increases and says he will eliminate the \$9.9

elaborate.

billion deficit in one year with statewide cuts on which he won't

"Quinn isn't my first choice, but he's better than Brady," Wheeler says. "What he [Brady] says about cutting spending to balance the budget suggests he is either not telling the truth, or he wasn't paying attention all those years in the Senate. For someone to suggest you can balance the budget in a year by cutting 10 percent, the math just doesn't work."

To make matters worse, Illinois has the worst-funded pension system of any state, with \$80 billion in unfunded liability caused by the legislature's use of pension payment money to pay its other bills. Meanwhile, the legislature left Springfield for a four-month vacation after borrowing more money to pay the latest pension bill and without addressing the tax question – most likely so that it wouldn't haunt them on election day. Still, Quinn wouldn't shame the legislature for their collective inaction.

"I think it's important to be civil to everybody, even those who blatantly disagree with you," he says. "I was disappointed (that the tax increase failed), but in a democracy, you've got to have the votes to pass it. We're building a majority, and there will be a majority this year to get the job done."

Both Charlie Wheeler and Rich Miller agree that Quinn has had trouble building consensus because of his bad relationship with legislative leaders – especially Speaker of the House Michael Madigan.

"He has been under the delusion that Michael Madigan is his friend," Miller says. "Michael Madigan is nobody's friend. Quinn has also been under the delusion that if he made friends with [Senate President] John Cullerton, that Cullerton would pull Madigan along, but that's bass-ackwards."

"I think Madigan still holds a grudge against Quinn because of the Cutback Amendment," Wheeler says, referring to Quinn's 1980 constitutional amendment that eliminated multi-member districts, reducing the size of the House by 59 members. "It's ironic because it actually helped Madigan by concentrating power with the legislative leaders."

Quinn has also created his own share of controversies. He oversaw the early release of nearly 2,000 Illinois inmates – several hundred of whom had committed violent crime and served just a few days or weeks in prison. A handful even made news for committing further violent crimes once released. Quinn has also fought with state employee unions over layoffs, angering a key voting bloc that usually votes Democratic without hesitation. He recently gave raises to members of his personal staff in the midst of the state's financial crisis and dealt with the public uproar by doubling from 12 to 24 the number of furlough days for non-union workers under his control.

In January, Quinn's then-chief of staff, Jerry Stermer, reported himself to Illinois Executive Inspector General James Wright for inadvertently using his state e-mail to send three messages related to Quinn's campaign, a relatively minor violation of state ethics law. Quinn subsequently fired Wright, a Blagojevich appointee, the same day Wright submitted his final report on the incidents to Quinn's office. Stermer resigned to avoid becoming a "distraction" for Quinn's campaign. Quinn claims he didn't see the report until after he fired Wright, but the timing of the firing cast Quinn in a poor light nonetheless.

But Quinn isn't letting the poll numbers, the financial crisis or his various missteps shake his self-confidence.

"You have to make tough decisions," Quinn says. "This is not a job for people like Senator Brady who don't want to take positions until after the election. ... I think when they come to vote on November second, they'll see I'm an honest guy, doing his level best to steer Illinois through a difficult time."

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