

Quinn Takes the Low Road in New Ad

Written by Rich Miller

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If you ever wondered whether Governor Pat Quinn would do whatever it takes to win re-election, all you need to do is look at his latest TV ad.

The spot is perhaps the most misleading TV advertisement of the season so far, but it packs quite a wallop. Quinn cannily "accuses" his Democratic primary opponent, Comptroller Dan Hynes, of having "signed off on every single state check."

"Now Hynes claims he'll cut the budget line by line, but as comptroller for 12 years he signed off on every single state check," the Quinn ad alleges.

The Quinn campaign claimed after the ad aired that they were trying to say that Hynes' statutory check-signing duties meant he ought to know what the budget is all about already and that Hynes shouldn't need to go over the budget line by line after he's elected to figure out where to cut waste and over-spending.

While the Quinn campaign's explanation for why they worded the attack ad the way they did is an interesting afterthought, if you watch the spot carefully you'll see that what it's really trying to say is Hynes is somehow responsible for the mess the state is in.

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Effective advertising is all about the message received, not the message sent. So when you pick apart a TV ad, you have to try to understand what the advertiser wants viewers to take away from it. And what the Quinn campaign is partially trying to do here is say that Hynes was somehow responsible for the budget meltdown under disgraced former governor Rod Blagojevich.

The Hynes campaign quickly launched a counterattack via press release: "[T]he Quinn campaign has opened the door to a discussion of who really stood for fiscal responsibility during the Blagojevich administration. While Dan Hynes repeatedly warned of overspending and pending fiscal catastrophe, Quinn stood silent. As recently as September, 2006, Quinn said of his two-time running mate: 'He's always been a person who's honest and one of integrity. I have confidence the governor does the right thing all the time.'"

It was probably only a matter of time before the Blagojevich card was played. And we can probably expect that to continue throughout the rest of the campaign. Blagojevich is the ultimate in political radioactivity. Combine "His Hairness" with the state's horrific budget deficit and Pat Quinn's resulting push to raise income taxes on the middle class and it's easy to see why Quinn would want to begin laying the groundwork to take Hynes down with him.

By the way, that new Quinn ad is titled "Spa."

The title refers to a claim within the ad that while Governor Quinn was hard at work on the state's budget, "Hynes skipped town, flying to Washington, taking a vacation, hitting a spa in Chicago."

Hynes claims the "spa" is a place just down the street from his home where he got a haircut. His longtime barber had temporarily moved to that location, so Hynes followed him over there. Speaking as someone who has had my hair cut by the same person for almost a decade, I can relate. By the way, she cuts hair at a "salon," just in case anybody ever thought about doing an attack ad on me.

Hynes' Washington, DC, trip was for an Obama campaign event attended by President Obama, Hynes' campaign claims. Ironically enough, shortly after the ad began airing, Quinn left Illinois for a Washington, DC, fundraising trip and skipped an important meeting with mass-transit

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officials.

The vacation mentioned in the Quinn ad was a family break with Hynes' three sons and his wife. Yes, it was taken while the General Assembly and the governor had not yet wrapped up the state budget, but Hynes didn't leave town when the legislature was in session.

Whatever the actual truth is, the Quinn ad's subtle connection of Hynes to Blagojevich and the overt taunting of Hynes for lollygagging in a spa while the state burns makes this a very effective advertisement. And like I said above, it shows that Quinn is no "high road" campaigner. He'll get right down there in the dirt and the mud and the blood if that's what it takes to win.

And he'll definitely need every trick in the book if he wants to survive what's sure to be the toughest campaign of his life.

Rich Miller also publishes Capitol Fax (a daily political newsletter) and TheCapitolFaxBlog.com