

Brady Keeps Blundering

Written by Rich Miller
Sunday, 28 February 2010 06:21

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Jerry Clarke is not easily ruffled. Not only has he seen it all in his years running campaigns in Illinois, but he's served several tours of duty in Iraq as a combat helicopter pilot.

But I thought Jerry might actually faint last week when I called him with an update on his candidate's latest piece of legislation. Clarke is running state Senator Bill Brady's gubernatorial campaign.

Brady's bill would undo a compromise worked out over two years to stop the practice of mass euthanasia of dogs and cats. The animals were often put into auto-exhaust gas chambers and killed *en masse*, sometimes allegedly by so-called "puppy mills" when the animals weren't sold. The gas chambers were deemed cruel because it could take as long as 30 minutes for the animals to die, and some even survived the ordeal.

One of the state's animal gas chambers is in Brady's Senate district, and Brady has said he sponsored the bill on a local veterinarian's behalf. Brady's new legislation would delete the law's requirement that "companion animals" be euthanized one at a time.

The Humane Society of Illinois blasted Brady's legislation: "This bill would allow numerous animals to be gassed at the same time, in the same chamber, which will cause fear and panic, at the same time these dogs will be gasping for their final breath."

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That's not exactly the image you want associated with your gubernatorial candidate, to say the least.

The point here is that Bill Brady is obviously not yet thinking like a statewide candidate. For crying out loud: You can't introduce a bill to help out your local puppy gas chamber when you're trying to get elected governor. I mean, seriously, what kind of thought process concocts an idea like that?

Clarke called me back to say that Brady would introduce an amendment to delete the bill's content. The next day, Brady handed off sponsorship to someone else. At least his campaign is finally learning that it'll have to keep this guy on a short and tight leash.

Jerry has no time to spare, either. As I write this, the Senate Democrats are drafting a state budget based on Brady's proposals from his Republican primary race.

During the primary race, Brady told the *Chicago Tribune*: "I believe Illinois needs to prioritize its programs and cut state spending by approximately 10 percent, saving \$5.5 billion on the \$55-billion base budget."

Brady's answer was dismissed by most budget experts because about half that \$55 billion figure can't really be altered much. You can't, for instance, just tell Wall Street that you're cutting your bond payments by 10 percent. So a 10-percent across-the-board cut to the operating budget would only provide about half of Brady's projected savings.

And now the Senate Democrats have decided to show the world just what, exactly, Brady's proposed 10-percent cut and billion-dollar tax cut would mean to Illinois - agency by agency.

The Senate Democrats have already passed a legislative-scholarship "reform" that was specifically designed to call attention to Brady's granting of a tuition waiver to the child of a campaign contributor. The ploy didn't work, though, because Brady uses an independent

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committee to award the scholarships. Also last week, the Democrats forced a hearing on Brady's campaign-finance-reform bill. The legislation was so poorly drafted that Brady was forced to agree to make numerous fixes, but the hearing got absolutely no media coverage.

The "Brady budget" proposal may finally break the media logjam, so this budget hearing could be a major test of Brady's campaign, and its early reaction was fairly strong.

"When are they going to hold hearings on Quinn's budget?" Clarke thundered last week when told of the planned budget hearings. Brady's campaign manager accused the Democrats of using a Senate committee and state-agency higher-ups for pure political gamesmanship while their own party - which has a huge majority in the chamber - hasn't yet come up with solutions of their own. Governor Pat Quinn's budget address will not be unveiled until a full week after the scheduled "Brady budget" hearing.

If Jerry can just get a hold on his guy, he may have a real shot here.

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