

Rauner Shows Smart Strategy in Early Moves

Written by Rich Miller

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Republican gubernatorial candidate Bruce Rauner has focused like a laser on his absolute disgust with public-employee unions such as AFSCME, the Illinois Education Association, and the Illinois Federation of Teachers. The wealthy former business executive claims the unions are the root of most of Illinois' problems and has decried the "corrupting" influence of their campaign cash on both political parties.

Illinois Republicans appear to overwhelmingly agree with Rauner.

"Would you be more likely or less likely to vote for a Republican candidate for governor who received hundreds of thousands of dollars in campaign contributions from public-employee unions?" 1,614 likely Republican-primary voters were asked August 21 in a *Capitol Fax/We Ask America* poll.

An overwhelming 80 percent said they'd be less likely to back such a candidate, while a mere 8 percent said they'd be more likely to do so.

The Rauner campaign claims that rival candidate state Senator Kirk Dillard has received more than \$400,000 from public-employee unions during his long career. Dillard has defended his friendship with the unions by saying they should be worked with, but he has also pointed to his support for union-opposed pension-reform bills. Even so, that labor cash appears to be a no-go for Dillard.

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Rauner's other two opponents, Treasurer Dan Rutherford and Senator Bill Brady, have also received significant contributions from public-employee unions, and Rauner's campaign has made it clear those ties will be used against them as well.

Rauner has also formed a new, well-funded political action committee to push for term limits. When asked if they'd be more or less likely to support a GOP gubernatorial candidate "who supports a constitutional amendment limiting the number of terms state legislators may serve," 76 percent of Republicans said they'd be more likely, while a mere 13 percent said they'd be less likely and 12 percent said it made no difference.

Brady says he supports legislative term limits, but he was first elected to the General Assembly 21 years ago. Rutherford and Dillard are both on record opposing term limits.

Both Brady and Dillard voted for a bill that allowed illegal immigrants to apply for state driver's licenses. A whopping 83 percent of likely Republican-primary voters said that this vote would make them less likely to support those candidates.

It's unlikely that Rauner would make a campaign issue out of those immigration votes, since he'd have a tough time winning the fall election if he does. The Latino vote, as I've pointed out time and time again, has gained incredible strength in this state. But Rauner has already benefited from third-party TV-ad spending (which helped drive Congressman Aaron Schock out of the race), and some of his supporters – including ultra-conservative millionaire Jack Roeser – are probably in a position to "help" make this an issue if necessary.

Roeser, by the way, wasn't happy that Rauner admitted to being pro-choice earlier this year. But the activist has stuck with Rauner, likely because of his outright hostility toward the teachers' unions. Roeser has long despised those unions.

A July 16 We Ask America poll found that Republican-primary voters aren't all that uniform on the issue anyway. Just 45 percent said they'd be less likely to vote for a pro-choice gubernatorial candidate. But 32 percent said they'd be more likely to vote for such a candidate, and 23 percent said the issue made no difference, meaning that Rauner's position doesn't really

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hurt him with more than half the primary electorate.

Because a recent poll found that 83 percent of GOP-primary voters would be less likely to vote for Rauner because of his close ties to Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel, Dillard and Brady have amped up their criticism of that relationship.

But, so far, neither Dillard nor Brady has shown he can raise the kind of money needed to run an effective negative paid media campaign.

And while those other candidates struggle to raise the money necessary to get on the air, Rauner can run all the ads he needs to tout the issues that put him on the same side as the vast majority of Republican-primary voters and to connect his opponents to the opposition.

Rauner seems to have a very deliberate, poll-tested victory strategy. He's no lock, but he has a workable plan.

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