

## Botched Millionaire Tax Brings Benefits to Democrats

Written by Rich Miller  
Sunday, 13 April 2014 05:03

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A long time ago I asked Illinois House Speaker Michael Madigan why he never golfed at his golf-outing fundraisers.

Madigan explained that he was a terrible golfer. (He's since improved, I'm told.) If people saw him embarrassing himself on the golf course, they might take a dimmer view of him as a leader.

He has applied this lesson to just about everything he does. He examines every angle before he acts. He hates mistakes and almost never acts impetuously.

For example, Madigan and his staff gather a few times a week to read through every bill and every amendment to those bills to look for flaws and hidden agendas or to discuss strategies. He always wants to be as prepared as possible.

As a result, he rarely fails.

But something else has been happening over the past year or so.

Madigan has become a media hound.

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The speaker has never really sought media attention. He does what he does, and then he goes home or, more likely, back to his office. A Republican friend of mine calls him “James Bond.”

But after getting royally hammered by the Chicago media over how he asked Metra to give one of his loyal patronage workers a raise, he’s seemed to change. Nowadays, he seeks publicity and credit.

It started after the House passed the gay-marriage bill. It wasn’t an easy task by any means, and Madigan publicly took the credit for its passage. A few months later, he took the lion’s share of the credit for passing the long-sought pension-reform bill.

Then, earlier this year, out of the blue, he proposed a 50-percent cut in the corporate-income-tax rate. He got a ton of media coverage, but he hasn’t yet followed up on it. It looked like a “press-release bill” – legislation unveiled merely to generate media interest. It might yet resurface, but as of now it has disappeared into the ether.

Madigan was also working behind the scenes this spring with the Senate Democrats on a constitutional amendment to impose a 3-percent surcharge on income over a million dollars. But then Madigan went ahead with his own announcement of the proposal. It was referred to in pretty much all media reports as “Madigan’s millionaire tax.”

At the time of the unveiling, Madigan said he’d done his homework and had talked to his members before announcing his proposal. The constitutional amendment required a three-fifths super-majority, so Madigan would need every single one of his Democrats if he couldn’t lock down any House Republican votes.

Representative Jack Franks, a Democrat who prides himself on voting against tax hikes, offered tentative early support, but his support was tied to allowing the 2011 income-tax hike to expire. Just days later, Madigan publicly supported keeping the tax hike permanent.

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Franks says he told the speaker that he couldn't back the proposed constitutional amendment a couple weeks ago. Madigan asked for time to try to find GOP votes. In the meantime, other Democrats went off the reservation, including Representative Scott Drury, who issued a press release last week announcing his opposition. The momentum was going too fast the other way, so the plug was pulled.

Madigan, through a spokesperson, blamed the Republicans for the proposal's defeat. But Madigan had surprised the Republicans with his plan's unveiling instead of finding some GOP support in advance.

As it turns out, Madigan simply bit off more than he could chew. His proposal failed, but he sure got a lot of publicity about it – much of it favorable.

And, hey, lemons into lemonade. Pro-business groups such as Americans for Prosperity Illinois offered up praise for Drury, who faces a Republican opponent in November. Drury and Franks "should be commended for siding with taxpayers and small businesses by taking a courageous stand against this proposal," said Americans for Prosperity Illinois State Director David From via press release. That'll surely make Drury more palatable to tax-sensitive business owners in his district.

And the proposal put Republican gubernatorial candidate Bruce Rauner in a difficult spot. Rauner flatly opposed the tax while leaving open the possibility that he could favor taxing retirement income and services. It didn't make him look good.

Maybe this is all part of some grand scheme. But right now it sure looks like James Bond has gone tabloid.

*Rich Miller also publishes Capitol Fax (a daily political newsletter) and [CapitolFax.com](http://CapitolFax.com).*