

Quinn Campaign Spitting in the Wind

Written by Rich Miller
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Governor Pat Quinn's new TV ad is 60 seconds of one positive message after another.

"Pat Quinn sees problems, takes action, and gets the job done," the ad claims. "Now, Illinois is making a comeback," it continues.

But the spot is being slammed by longtime campaign insiders in both parties as "spitting in the wind."

For instance, a Paul Simon Public Policy Institute poll in June found that a mere 30 percent of Illinoisans thought the state was on the right track, while a 60-percent majority thought Illinois was on the wrong track.

And an infamous poll taken by Gallup in April found that 50 percent of Illinoisans would move to a different state if given the chance. We were first in the country on that response, according to Gallup. Just 25 percent of Minnesotans, by contrast, felt the same way.

In other words, a positive TV ad campaign is not very likely to change many minds. Way too many people simply hate the way things are going here.

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Instead, Democratic critics have been arguing behind the scenes to abandon positivity in the very near future and launch a full-on, brutal assault against Bruce Rauner as soon as possible. And quite a few experienced Republican operatives were scratching their heads at the ad, saying they highly doubted it would move any numbers at all.

The Quinn campaign obviously tested that initial message with focus groups and polling. So, hey, maybe they're right. But when's the last time you heard someone say they were proud to live in this state or that things were really starting to turn around?

Meanwhile, the Quinn folks are reportedly hoping to drive up turnout by more than 200,000 votes with the nonbinding minimum-wage referendum this fall, which asks voters if they support a \$10-per-hour minimum wage.

That turnout projection has long caused much consternation behind the scenes among people who believe it's entirely unrealistic. What the Quinners are hoping to do has never been done before, critics point out. The Quinn campaign's projections rely heavily on a record off-year turnout, even though the national and state headwinds are rapidly nearing hurricane levels and Democratic interest is quite low.

Democrats are hoping to spend as much as \$5 million on the minimum-wage project to drive otherwise unmotivated "base" voters to the polls. U.S. Senator Dick Durbin's campaign is reportedly in full agreement, and pressure from both Durbin and Quinn has forced the Chicago City Council to delay a vote on its own \$13-minimum-wage ordinance. The cold calculation was that a \$13-per-hour ordinance passed in September would undermine the Democrats' \$10-per-hour efforts in the fall campaign.

On the other side of the fence, Bruce Rauner's campaign has calculated a voter-turnout increase of more than 300,000 just to be on the safe side. After Rauner's unexpectedly narrow GOP primary win (despite internal Rauner polls showing the candidate with greater than a 20-point lead), the Republicans want to be extra sure that they plan for every possible contingency.

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To some Democrats, that Rauner projection validates their theory of a turnout spike. They believe that early voting, same-day registration, and other new “tools” will assist them in reaching their goal.

To others, it's just smart politics by Rauner and dangerous optimism by Quinn. In other words, if the spike happens, Rauner will have prepared himself. If it doesn't happen, Quinn is likely toast.

At least in public, however, Rauner is making some pretty darned inflated claims himself. He reportedly told a group of African-American small businessmen last week that he will get 28 percent of the black vote in Chicago – something that hasn't been done there in a very long time.

But he's certainly trying hard. ABC 7's Charles Thomas reported last week that Rauner committed at that same meeting to deposit \$1 million of his personal fortune into a Chicago credit union to be used for small-business loans.

The Rauner campaign confirmed the story with Thomas, calling the pledge “one of many steps Bruce will take to reinvigorate our communities that have suffered under the failed policies and broken commitments of politicians.”

That “one of many” phrase has got to send chills up the Quinn campaign's collective spine.

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