

## Edgar Gives Rauner an Unexpected State-Fair Boost

Written by Rich Miller

Sunday, 17 August 2014 10:30

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I'm not sure why, but the surprise appearance by former Governor Jim Edgar at the Illinois State Fair's Republican Day last week didn't generate much media coverage.

Despite the fact that Edgar is a Republican, this was not an easy "get" for Republican gubernatorial nominee Bruce Rauner. I'm told it took weeks of careful wooing and negotiations through one of Edgar's cronies. Edgar backed state Senator Kirk Dillard in the GOP primary against Rauner, and he has also expressed public and private concerns about how Rauner is portraying himself on the stump and about how that confrontational attitude could manifest itself if he's elected governor.

Another reason why I'm perplexed by the lack of coverage is that Democratic Governor Pat Quinn has repeatedly gone out of his way to praise Edgar since Dillard's Republican-primary loss. Quinn consulted with Edgar before his post-primary budget address, seeking his advice on keeping the income tax at current levels and providing some property-tax relief. Quinn then mentioned Edgar by name during his actual address, saying the former governor was right to keep a tax hike in place.

If Quinn was hoping to somehow neutralize the still-popular Edgar, he failed miserably. Edgar said at the State Fair last week that not only did Rauner have an opportunity to finally end one-party rule, but that "the Blagojevich-Quinn governorship has been a disaster for Illinois."

Oh, man, that's gonna leave a mark.

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“Outsiders” can make some Illinoisans uncomfortable. Despite the blathering of editorial boards and pundits, quite a few voters here subconsciously or otherwise still “don’t want nobody that nobody sent.” The Edgar endorsement could go a very long way toward soothing fears of moderate to liberal independents that Rauner may be just too new, too unknown, and too risky to be trusted with the office.

Meanwhile, four years ago I wrote that Quinn wouldn’t know a campaign theme if it was bleeding to death in his front yard. His 2010 State Fair Governor’s Day speech was rambling, disjointed, and unfocused. Not this year. Quinn’s theme so far is pretty darned clear: Bruce Rauner is an out-of-touch billionaire whose policies would harm working people.

But can it work? So far, the attacks seem juvenile, catty, and poorly produced. “Look! Over there! Rauner is rich! He’s rich, I tells ya!”

The Quinn campaign appears to be following the Obama 2012 script very closely (and that script was based in part on Quinn’s 2010 campaign against Bill Brady). The first thing they have to do is establish in voters’ minds that Rauner is a plutocrat. Once that message is baked in, the big hits connecting him to nursing-home and hospital deaths and whatever else the Quinnsters have in their opposition-research files can be dumped on Rauner’s head.

The political professionals who attended Governor’s Day this year weren’t confident at all that Quinn could pull this off. Then again, they had zero confidence in Quinn four years ago, and he managed to edge out Brady. But, of course, there’s no third-party candidate willing to spend close to \$4 million and split the anti-Quinn vote with the GOP nominee this year, as there was in 2010.

In contrast, the GOP operatives who attended Republican Day four years ago were upbeat and hopeful, but quite concerned about the physical mechanics of Brady’s campaign. Those fears turned out to be justified. This time around, there were few if any fears expressed about the way their guy is running his show.

And probably for good reason. The Rauner folks say that the Republican Governors Association

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has been tracking the number of contacts made at the doors by GOP gubernatorial campaigns. Rauner's door-to-door contact effort so far ranks number-one in the nation – even ahead of Texas, which has a far larger population than Illinois.

Rauner, by the way, left after his State Fair appearance for a 38-county bus blitz through Downstate Illinois. The schedule looks brutal.

The idea is to pack in as many Downstate appearances before Labor Day and then focus on the Chicago media market until November. It's the smart move because Downstate is so huge that it can't be easily and quickly traversed.

The governor, on the other hand, has focused much of his summertime attention on the Chicago area, perhaps because polls show he has real trouble with his Democratic "base."

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