

Quinn's Best Shot Lies with Minimum-Wage Efforts

Written by Rich Miller

Sunday, 24 August 2014 05:36

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Some recent *Chicago Tribune* poll results appear to indicate that support for raising the minimum wage in the state's largest city may be enough to increase voter turnout for a non-binding November ballot referendum.

The poll found that 84 percent of registered Chicago voters support a city-task-force recommendation to increase the minimum wage to \$13 per hour over the next three years. According to the poll, 78 percent of whites and 92 percent of African Americans and even 71 percent of Chicagoans making more than \$100,000 a year back the plan.

Democrats have been hoping to use the referendum – which asks about raising the minimum wage to \$10 an hour – as a tool to help spur turnout in what is rapidly developing into a big Republican year. And with the *Tribune's* numbers backing a much higher minimum wage, it does seem likely that the issue can be effective, particularly among African Americans. Support above 70 to 80 percent is generally seen as having a ballot impact. Get above 90 and it's sure to drive votes. Then again, the comparatively "stingy" state-ballot proposal, when compared to the Chicago proposal, might garner less enthusiasm.

Proponents are hoping to use the issue to convince 400,000 people to sign "pledge cards" stating they will definitely vote this November. So far, they've collected 70,000 cards, which they will use to track the signatories through election day.

The bigger question, though, is what Illinois House Speaker Michael Madigan does with all the

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money he's been raising to push the ballot initiative. Madigan, who is also the state Democratic Party chair, has been traveling the country to raise cash. Everybody who chipped in to recall Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker in 2012 is being paid a visit. Labor unions alone spent more than \$20 million on that race, and Madigan is telling those labor leaders that they can spend the money now to defeat the anti-union Bruce Rauner or spend the money later to fight Rauner after he's elected.

The Republicans are attempting to convince themselves that Madigan will spend that cash on his hottest state legislative races instead of in Chicago and south suburban Cook County, where it would do the most good for the statewide ticket because of high numbers of African Americans. Democrats have often complained in the past that "coordinated campaign" money has been redirected to Madigan's legislative races, and they're not sure what he'll do this year.

Most are fairly certain that Madigan won't have his candidates run away from the top of the ticket. The speaker tried that in 1994, during a huge Republican wave. Late in the game, photos of Republican Governor Jim Edgar started appearing in Democratic legislative mailers. But that backfired in a major way. It just helped Edgar win by a larger margin, which swept away Madigan's candidates. Madigan has to do whatever he can to boost Governor Pat Quinn's prospects within his districts, and that means lots of voter registration and get-out-the-vote activities. And none of those all important districts is in Chicago or south suburban Cook County.

But it won't be easy. I've seen some private polling results recently that show Quinn doing even worse than expected in suburban counties where Madigan has some other tough races. My own polling has shown Rauner doing quite well in suburban Cook County, which has trended Democratic over the years and will be the scene of several hotly contested Illinois House races.

And, the other day, a top Democratic strategist derided as "stupid" the Quinn campaign's attempt to convince Illinoisans that the job and economic situation is starting to turn around.

"They're telling voters not to believe their own lying eyes," he complained. Focus groups, he said, are finding that voters "are so mad at the state of things that it insults their intelligence to tell them things are changing, especially in the Downstate communities."

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The Democrat had knowledge of one particular Downstate congressional focus group that found people were “openly hostile to Quinn – like punch-him-if-he-was-in-the-room-at-the-time hostile.” Madigan has one tier-one contest in that congressional district and another adjacent to the district.

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