

Positions for Illinois Gubernatorial Candidates

Written by Jeff Ignatius

Tuesday, 29 October 2002 18:00

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Republicans have controlled the governor's mansion in Illinois since 1977, and that stranglehold has been a consistent theme in the campaign of Democrat Rod Blagojevich. Blagojevich, a member of the U. S. House of Representatives, is trying to end more than two decades of Republican domination of the executive branch of state government. Republican Jim Ryan, the state's attorney general, is trying to keep the GOP winning streak alive.

The race for governor also features Libertarian Cal Skinner, a former Republican state legislator, and independent Marisellis Brown of Danville, who is on the ballot but not conducting an active campaign.

The race to this point has swirled around the issue of character. Blagojevich has criticized Ryan for not being aggressive in prosecuting the bribes-for-driver's-licenses scandal that has plagued the term of Governor and former Secretary of State George Ryan. The attorney general, meanwhile, has accused Blagojevich of ties to corruption, labeling him part of Chicago machine politics. (Blagojevich's father-in-law is a powerful Chicago alderman.)

Skinner has been excluded from the gubernatorial debates, and he claims he's the only candidate willing to talk about the issues. He has traveled around the state with a supporter dressed in a chicken outfit with two heads, called "JimRod."

Blagojevich is considered the front-runner in the race, although Ryan has been closing the gap in recent weeks.

State Budget

The next Illinois governor is expected to face a budget hole of \$2 billion for the Fiscal Year 2003-4 because of stagnant revenues and increased costs associated with the Medicaid program and state-worker benefits. In addition, both Ryan and Blagojevich have pledged to increase state spending in certain areas. At the same time, both major-party candidates have promised to hold the line on taxes, and neither has offered a proposal to cut state expenditures significantly.

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Rod Blagojevich (www.rodforus.com): Blagojevich has offered proposals that would involve extra state spending in the areas of economic development, education, and health care. A consistent theme in Blagojevich's campaign has been to use state money to leverage federal funds in areas such as health insurance. Blagojevich's Web site makes no mention of his position on taxes, but he has said that tax increases are bad policy.

Jim Ryan (www.jimryanforgovernor.com): According to his Project Vote Smart Survey, Ryan would "slightly increase" funding for higher education, primary and secondary education, health care, and law enforcement. He would "maintain funding status" for the environment, transportation and highway infrastructure, and welfare. He did not say that he would decrease funding in any area. Ryan would also support more state funds for prison construction and staffing.

On taxes, Ryan claims he would "maintain" taxation levels in all areas, except that he would be "open to increasing tax on riverboat gambling profits and channeling funds to school construction." He also said he supports eliminating the inheritance tax.

Cal Skinner (www.skinnerforgovernor.com): According to his Project Vote Smart survey, Skinner would support maintaining current funding levels for higher education, primary and secondary education, the environment, law enforcement, and transportation and highway infrastructure. He would support slightly decreasing funding for health care and welfare.

Skinner said that on taxes he would support greatly decreasing cigarette taxes, slightly decreasing corporate taxes, slightly decreasing all income taxes, eliminating inheritance taxes, and slightly decreasing property taxes. He said he would maintain the level of all other taxes.

Skinner has said that he would cut state spending to balance the budget, and although he hasn't been specific about spending reductions, he has said he would cut legislators' pet "pork" projects. He has also suggested a 10-percent reduction of nonunion state salaries and a hiring freeze.

Campaign Finance

Rod Blagojevich: Supports limits on contributions from individuals and organizations. He supported eliminating "soft money" from federal campaigns.

Jim Ryan: Would not support limiting contributions from individuals, PACs, corporations, and political parties.

Cal Skinner: Does not support limits on individual, PAC, corporate, or political-party contributions.

Abortion

Rod Blagojevich: Blagojevich's voting record has consistently earned perfect ratings from reproductive-rights organizations, and 0-percent ratings from right-to-life groups.

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Jim Ryan: According to Ryan's Project Vote Smart survey, the Republican supports parental notification and the right to an abortion when the life of the woman is in danger. He does not support the right to an abortion in the case of rape or incest. Ryan also said he supports eliminating public funding of abortions and public funding for organizations that advocate or perform abortions. But Ryan has also stated that he will uphold the law.

Cal Skinner: Skinner's abortion position on his Project Vote Smart survey mirrors Ryan's. He has said in addition that he favors whatever protections to unborn children that the U.S. Supreme Court will allow.

Crime & Punishment

Rod Blagojevich: The Democratic candidate authored truth-in-sentencing legislation that required criminals to serve at least 85 percent of their sentences before being eligible for parole. He is also a supporter of community policing and "community prosecution" programs – in which prosecutors work with neighborhood groups and citizens to try to craft legal strategies to prevent crime. Blagojevich once promoted a ban on handguns but has backed off that position during this campaign. Blagojevich is a supporter of capital punishment, yet he supports many of the reforms suggested by a state panel earlier this year. He does not, however, favor further restricting eligibility for the death penalty.

Jim Ryan: Truth-in-sentencing legislation was one of Ryan's key initiatives during his first term as attorney general. He supports the death penalty, but also the state's current moratorium on executing death-row prisoners and proposed reforms to the capital-punishment system. He also supports restricting eligibility for the death penalty. Ryan supports alternatives to incarceration for certain nonviolent offenders, stronger penalties for drug offenses, no parole for repeat violent offenders, an end to racial profiling by police departments, and treating crimes based on gender, sexual orientation, or disability as hate crimes.

Cal Skinner: Skinner supports the death penalty and opposes the state's current moratorium on executions. Skinner favors some of the capital-punishment reforms suggested by a state panel but has not given a firm position on restricting eligibility. He does not support increasing state funds for prison construction and staffing. Unlike many libertarians, he does not support de-criminalizing marijuana for medical use, and does not support alternatives to incarceration for nonviolent offenders, according to his Project Vote Smart survey. He doesn't support increasing sentences for drug offenses, banning racial profiling by police departments, or treating crimes based on gender, sexual orientation, or disability as hate crimes. A centerpiece of his campaign is to "allow licensed, trained, law-abiding citizens" to carry weapons.

Minimum Wage

Rod Blagojevich: Supports increasing the state's minimum wage to \$6.50 an hour.

Jim Ryan: Has said jobs would leave Illinois if the state raises its minimum wage and neighboring states do not.

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Cal Skinner: Supports leaving the minimum wage at its current level.

Education

Rod Blagojevich: Supports a state law that would require that 51 percent of new revenues be used for education, and also advocates a more aggressive pursuit of federal education dollars. Supports some accountability standards.

Jim Ryan: Supports the current policy of devoting 51 percent of new revenues to education, and supports a multiple-year plan that establishes the minimum amount of funding per pupil in the state. Ryan has said he would abolish the state's Department of Education and create a cabinet-level position that reports to the governor. He supports school vouchers in theory but says they aren't practical. He also supports state standards and federal testing requirements.

Cal Skinner: Supports the Heartland Institute's "scholarship" plan with school choice at its heart. Skinner argues that money isn't the answer to the state's education problems but would attempt to maintain current funding levels.