

## Illinois Comptroller Leads the Democratic Field for Senate, but He's Vulnerable

Written by Rich Miller

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Let's continue our look at U.S. Senate candidates. This time, the Democrats:

- **Comptroller Dan Hynes** – Obviously the man to beat. Hynes has lined up big-time labor support, he has the backing of most county Democrat chairmen, he has put together a good organization, and he has won two statewide elections by wide margins.

So why is he considered vulnerable? Well, his name recognition is still pretty low, and kabillionaire Blair Hull is a huge threat.

Just as importantly, he has yet to say why he's running, other than he thinks he can win. His overly cautious, conservative manner contrasts starkly with some of his opponents.

In a normal year, Hynes would be a lock. But next year might not be normal. Democrats are furious at George W. Bush and at their party's leadership for going along with the Bush tax and war programs. Hynes has no anger about him, and he might come off as a guy who will do what he's told. If his opponents can "nationalize" this race, then he'll find himself in trouble. (<http://www.danhynes.com>)

- **Blair Hull** – He's helped finance Democratic campaigns for years, and now Hull wants his own shot at the big time. So far, though, he's viewed more as a spoiler than a potential victor.

In most years, winning a statewide Democratic primary requires two things: organizational support and name familiarity. Hull has neither, yet. And Dem voters don't usually trust rich white guys as their standard-bearers.

But his early TV ads are moving him up in the polls, and his strategy seems to be to tap into that disenchantment among rank-and-file Democrats. If he ever gets his act together (his staff is terribly top-heavy), he will make a legit run next spring. (<http://www.blairhull.com>)

- **State Senator Barack Obama** – The general reaction to Obama is that he would probably be a great U.S. Senator, but that his foreign-sounding name and his race hurt his chances.

A Harvard Law graduate, Obama is a thoughtful progressive. He will do well with the all-important African-American voter base, although U.S. Representative Bobby Rush's endorsement of Blair Hull will hurt.

Obama is working hard to expand his reach to young professional Democrats and Downstate voters. He was endorsed recently by U.S. Representative Lane Evans, but Evans' organization ain't what it used to be. He's also not doing too badly in the fundraising department.

By far, Obama is the most impressive potential senator. If he can somehow portray that to voters, he has a great shot. (<http://www.obamaforillinois.com>)

- **Cook County Treasurer Maria Pappas** – She's received very little attention by the pundits and the political insiders, but if Pappas ever gets moving, this could be hers to lose.

Pappas is so full of vitality she could easily tap into grassroots anger at the Washington

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establishment. She is also better known in Cook County than any other candidate, including Dan Hynes.

So far, she has no organization, no campaign infrastructure, no ideas. But if she shows she understands the issues awaiting her in D.C., and can raise enough money to pick up a few votes Downstate, she could possibly jump right to the top of the pack.

- **Gery Chico** – The top of the second tier by virtue of the money he's raised, Chico has convinced few people that he can win.

Talk to his former law-firm partners and you'll hear stories about how Chico mismanaged Altheimer & Gray right into the ground. The firm's bankruptcy, and the bad press it caused him when he was president of the Chicago public-schools system, will haunt him throughout his campaign.

Claims have surfaced that someone might be raising illegal cash contributions from restaurants for Chico's campaign – an old Chicago tradition.

I don't know how someone can possibly shake all of that baggage and still be nominated. (<http://www.chicoforsenate.com>)

- **Nancy Skinner** – The liberal radio-talk-show host has attracted some national attention in her U.S. Senate bid, but has so far barely penetrated the local media.

But that national exposure could help her raise enough money to compete. She could be the dark horse to watch. (<http://www.skinnerthewinner.com>)

- **Joyce Washington** – A health-care executive who made a credible run for lieutenant governor last year, Washington has made few inroads this time. Her campaign is self-financed so far, but she's not wealthy enough to continue that for long. Rumors abound that she is in the race solely to take votes away from fellow African American Barack Obama, but I highly doubt she is that cynical.

- **Matt O'Shea** – The Republican mayor of Metamora, O'Shea is one of the longest of the long shots. He has no personal wealth, no organization, no base, and no real clue about how to run a statewide campaign. (<http://www.matthewoshea.tk>)

- **Estella Johnson-Hunt** – Who? (<http://www.ejh4Lawmaker.org>)

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