

SNG-Money will likely decide governor's race-1-27-13

Big dollars will likely decide gubernatorial primary

By Jim Nowlan

Republican gubernatorial aspirant Bruce Rauner spent more than \$4 million in the past quarter alone on sophisticated TV ads to define himself as the anti-union, pro-term limits candidate who can transform Illinois government.

As a result, the previously unknown candidate is now the clear front-runner in a four-way race, according to recent polls.

As savvy political reporter Rich Miller observes: "Paid media, and in particular television, moves (poll) numbers. Period. End of story."

Afraid that the mega-bucks Rauner will win the GOP primary, Democrat-leaning labor unions are planning to mount a television ad barrage aimed at defining Rauner as someone you wouldn't want to take home to dinner, let alone be governor.

Rauner will use his money to turn lemons into lemonade, asking Republican primary voters, not a pro-union bunch, if the unions are attacking him solely because he is the best bet to beat the Democrats in November.

Either way, big money—from unions and Rauner—is likely to decide the March primary race for governor, which is too bad.

In the 1980s, I wrote a scholarly journal article that showed convincingly, or so I thought, that money spent on television advertising could make the difference in a statewide election.

I looked at the 1982 race for the GOP nomination for the almost-invisible office of state treasurer. One of the candidates had money for television ads, but the ads ran only in the vote-

rich northern half of Illinois only. The other candidate had no money for TV but had more of the endorsements of GOP county organizations, once an indicator of influence with voters.

Using a statistical technique that controlled somewhat for variables such as county party endorsements, the results showed that the candidate who spent on TV advertising did better than otherwise expected in counties where his ads appeared.

The candidate with TV ads also did better than expected in counties where his opponent was endorsed by the county political organizations. Most important, the candidate won the nomination.

In my mind, money for television, and now social media, advertising has become even more important in the intervening years. County party organizations are but hollow shells of what they were decades ago, when party workers patrolled their precincts in behalf of endorsed candidates.

Money is completely unbalanced in the GOP primary race for governor. In contrast to the \$4 million Rauner raised in the past quarter (a million dollars from himself), state senators Kirk Dillard and Bill Brady generated \$329,000 and \$74,000, respectively.

State Treasurer Dan Rutherford also raised relatively little, but he has squirreled away \$1.4 million to be spent on television ads. This sounds like a lot, yet will probably be small beer against what Rauner spends.

Political campaigns are all about defining one's own candidate as the person in whom voters can have trust and confidence while defining the opponent(s) as unseemly or worse.

A candidate feels fortunate if he has enough money to define himself. Rarely does a candidate have enough resources to define the opponents as well.

Rauner has more than enough personal wealth to do both; his reported income for last year was \$53 million!

This is not to say the candidate with the most money always wins. In the 2004 Democratic primary for the U.S. Senate, megabucks investor Blair Hull had a hefty lead over state comptroller Dan Hynes and state senator Barack Obama.

Late in the campaign, however, allegations about marital problems surfaced and Hull's support plummeted, allowing Obama to win the senate race and not long thereafter become President.

Rauner has probably been hurt by his statement that the state minimum wage should be cut by a dollar-an-hour. In spite of that, a poll reported recently by Rich Miller showed Rauner with a 2-to-1 lead over his nearest opponent, even after a week of bad press on the minimum wage flap.

Look for millions of dueling dollars in the form of TV ads in the coming month from labor unions and their nemesis Bruce Rauner. His GOP opponents will be watching, mostly on the television sidelines, hoping for a union knockout blow.