

SNG-Nowlan-8-19-13-“Lite guv” selection process

“Lite Guv” selection task tough

By Jim Nowlan

For the first time, gubernatorial candidates in Illinois must this year woo and select their runningmates for lieutenant governor before circulating petitions this September-December.

Though the office is of little note, candidates will spend significant time on the selection. They would love to get a boost from their runningmate (not likely) and must at all costs avoid a teammate who could hurt them in the March 2014 primary (not impossible).

This offers a great opportunity for aspiring politicians, especially women, who have not yet achieved front rank.

[I have some experience here. In 1971, Republican governor Dick Ogilvie wanted to endorse a runningmate before the primary in order to dissuade a couple of less than attractive types from running, as they wanted to do. (Ogilvie’s first lieutenant governor was Democrat Paul Simon at a time the offices were separate.)

[Ogilvie had enacted the income tax in 1969, so was about as popular as the bubonic plague. Nevertheless, he hoped to convince young congressmen John Anderson and Don Rumsfeld to consider running with him (no way, they said).

[I was an invisible young member of the Illinois House, without any visible warts, and became the best that Ogilvie could find willing, so he endorsed me a few days before filing petitions. The other wannabees deferred to Ogilvie, and I won the primary unopposed. I went on to provide little if anything to the ticket, as is the case with most such runningmates.]

The six present gubernatorial candidates are looking for some combination of geographic, gender, color and philosophical balance. Finding the right runningmate is tougher than you might imagine.

First, the office of lite gov is of little moment. There are no constitutional duties and few statutory responsibilities. Your primary job is to stick your head in the governor's office from time to time to ask how he is feeling.

St. Clair County Sheriff Dave O'Neal became one of Jim Thompson's lieutenant governors and quit out of boredom. Former state senator Bob Kustra became lieutenant governor under Jim Edgar but resigned from the post to become a university president.

On the other hand, George Ryan went from lite gov to secretary of state and then governor in 1998, and present governor Pat Quinn was Rod Blagojevich's lieutenant governor.

There is a rich talent bank in the Illinois General Assembly, though House members, who run every election, are not likely to give up their seats to risk losing for lite gov in either the primary or general election.

However, about half the state senators have "free rides" this coming year, that is, they run every four years and thus are not up for re-election this cycle. These senators may find the opportunity for state office alluring, as they would still be in the senate if they lost.

Here is my rundown of the types the gubernatorial hopefuls might select:

Gov. Pat Quinn is unpopular downstate, but more than 60 percent of the Democratic primary vote is cast in Cook County alone, so he may want a black or Hispanic from Cook. His present lite gov is Sheila Simon of Carbondalre, daughter of the late U.S. senator, who is running for comptroller.

Quinn will have a tough time finding a runningmate, as he is so unpopular with legislators, whose salaries he vetoed, among other slams against lawmakers.

Chicagoan Bill Daley, of the Democratic Daley clan, will want either an attractive black such as state senators Toi Hutchinson or Kimberly Lightford, who do not face re-election in 2014, or a downstater, where his name is not playing well.

On the Republican side, Bill Brady of Bloomington is probably vetting suburban women, a region and gender where Brady fared badly in his narrow loss to Quinn in 2010.

(By the way, gender was not even a consideration back in 1972 when I was a candidate; times change quickly.)

State treasurer Dan Rutherford of Pontiac will also probably want a suburban woman, though I have no idea who that might be.

State senator Kirk Dillard of suburban DuPage County is probably looking for a downstate woman. Karen Hasara comes to mind; a former state senator, mayor of Springfield and member of the University of Illinois Board of Trustees, Karen would be an attractive match.

Wild-card megabucks financier Bruce Rauner is thought of as a Chicagoan, where his business is located, but he grew up in the suburbs. Several downstate senators with free rides such as former prosecutor Dal Righter (R-Mattoon) might make attractive complements.

The only thing I am confident about is that there will be four or five women among the six lieutenant governor selections. Gender matters in 2014.