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Gubernatorial races closer than they appear

By Jim Broadway, Publisher, Illinois School News Service

There *should* be no big surprises tomorrow. Incumbent [Gov. Bruce Rauner](#) *should* be nominated by Republican primary voters to seek reelection in November. Chicago billionaire [JB Pritzker](#), with his money and all the support the Democratic establishment can deliver, *should* eke out his party's nomination.

Then those two guys will show the rest of the country a thing or two about how to purchase the top political office in a major state like Illinois. Quarter of a billion in the general election campaign? That's just for openers.

But they do have to survive Tuesday's primaries, and to say there "*should*" be no surprises is not the same thing as saying there "*will be*" no surprises. Rauner's failings in office have been conspicuous; he has [outraged most of his party's base](#); plus he has a very smart - and exceptionally mean - opponent nipping at his heels.

Pritzker is also somewhat hoisted on his own petard. He can't seem to get beyond the FBI-taped phone chats with former Gov. Rod Blagojevich, conversations in which he appeared to grovel for a political appointment, conversations in which he and Blagojevich both displayed their [dismissiveness of African Americans](#).

What do the polls say about these contests? Pritzker and Rauner have been in the lead consistently, but the Republican challenger, state [Rep. Jeanne Ives \(R-Wheaton\)](#) has been nibbling away at Rauner's margin. Based on the conservative dollars flowing her way, my guess is that [she trails by just single digits](#) today.

And now there's evidence that *Pritzker's margin has shrunk to the single digits*. Chicago [TV journalist Mary Ann Ahern](#) reported Sunday that the billionaire - after self-funding his campaign at \$70 million - was polled a mere 6 points ahead of Chicago businessman [Chris Kennedy](#). Pritzker leads with 32% to Kennedy's 26%.

And that's not all. The Victory Research poll showed state [Sen. Daniel Biss \(D-Evanston\)](#) also closing in with 22% of likely voters supporting him - and as *evidence that anything can happen*, a whopping 16% were still "undecided." I think those "undecideds" are looking for a non-Pritzker candidate. Kennedy may hope old folks like me [remember "Camelot."](#) Biss has been [making national news](#) with efforts to [rally college students](#) to his cause.

House Speaker (and state Democratic chairman) Michael Madigan lamely claims neutrality, but he lined up unions and party honchos for Pritzker. Looks as if Madigan is [most worried about Biss](#). (Maybe he recalls 1972 when a surge of college campus support made a winner of Dan Walker over the favored Paul Simon.)

What will happen after the primary dust settles? I think that depends mostly on what the Republican voters decide. If Rauner gets another chance to carry the party's banner, he will be beaten by the Democratic nominee, no matter who that turns out to be. Rauner's governorship has just demoralized Illinois Republicans.

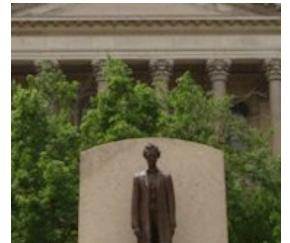
But if Ives is the GOP nominee, all bets are off. This is still a blue state, and there is evidence of a Democratic "wave" forming nationally and in Illinois, but Donald Trump did ring up more than 2 million votes here in 2016, and those voters form a "base" that Jeanne Ives may well be able to energize.

Unlike Rauner, Ives' political persona is [very similar to that of Trump](#) (except in her case the far-right positions have been there all along, not adopted as an act of political opportunism). Like Trump, she also has more than one face, is capable of sounding quite reasonable even as she protects her [ratings with the NRA](#).

An Ives-Pritzker battle would be messy. He has all the money he needs and is clearly willing to spend what it takes. But Ives is a pit bull, a gifted attack candidate. She would capitalize on the Pritzker-Blagojevich tapes and tie him in knots. He has "apologized" for what he said, but what good is that?

Rauner is an amateur, as his [dumb effort to link Ives to Madigan](#) shows. (Is Rauner taking a dive?) And the Democratic Governor's Association is stupid for airing [reverse-psychology ads](#) that are obviously designed to help Ives on Tuesday. That's a bad idea. As a Democrat, I'm rooting for Rauner tomorrow.

Bottom line predictions: Rauner survives the primary and the GOP goes into the general election campaigns with a loser at the top of the ticket. Pritzker also survives; either Biss or Kennedy would easily overtake the rich guy, but they're splitting the vote that is not deliverable by the unions and the Democratic establishment.



If I'm wrong, it won't be the first time.

Are students getting stressed out by politics? It does seem like it's been a long time since Pritzker opened his wallet and Rauner decided to renew his lease on the second floor of the Capitol. And remember, tomorrow is not the end of the trail. It is just the beginning of the end. By November, you'll get rid of your TV (like me).

But it's not just us adults that we need to worry about. University of Michigan researchers have published their thoughts in *The Conversation*, a blog written by academics on various subjects, substantiating suspicions that electoral politics - the elections of 2016 in particular - have [brought many youths to the brink of despair](#).

Assistant Professor Tammy Chang of the University of Michigan Department of Family Medicine, and department research fellow Melissa DeJonckheere, relate worries young people have been reporting - worries about a lack of opportunities for them in the future, worries about sleeplessness, worries about WW III.

They conducted research prior to and following the 2016 elections and published their findings in the February issue of [Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health](#), reporting in the abstract that "feelings of stress, anxiety, and fear have persisted in the months following the election, particularly for young women."

"Politics is not just politics when it is hurting America's youth," the researchers asserted. "We encourage those who work with young people - such as teachers, clinicians and parents - to see this as a critical opportunity. Now is the time to [model positive coping strategies](#), embrace thoughtful conversation, [encourage voting and volunteer work](#) for causes youth care about and perhaps instill a sense of hope through our own actions and words."

As you know, the House and Senate have taken some time off. They won't return to the Capitol until April 9 and 10, respectively. There are some bills I wanted to bring to your attention, but they can wait until the end of the week at least. Both chambers will have some heavy lifting to do when they return.

Meanwhile, give some thought to what you are going to do tomorrow, if you have not voted already. I'm sure all six Democrats running for governor will get some votes, and the two Republicans on that ballot are likely to run a close race. There are other offices to consider as well.

In recent election cycles, it seems to me that cynicism has increased. But that attitude is akin to giving up on democracy. Are political campaigns "dirty"? Yeah, in many ways, but that's been the case since Adams and Jefferson. What Abraham Lincoln endured seems extreme today, in spite of the Internet attacks.

As you know, my own sense of having a stake in the outcomes is more limited than it has been in past years. But that's a stage in life that everyone will reach, if they're lucky. In the last segment there was a reference to "coping strategies." One of them was "mindfulness" (if you clicked the link). It's highly recommended.

I'll be back in touch by Friday. - Jim

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