

Commentary: Instead of campaigning, here's what Rauner, Pritzker should do with those millions



The contest for Illinois governor almost surely will smash spending records, with billionaire J.B. Pritzker and possible billionaire Bruce Rauner running (Chicago Tribune staff)

**Allen R. Sanderson**

After a bruising, ugly race to “Occupy Springfield,” the Illinois primary races for governor are finally, and mercifully, over. In the process, the two men left standing allegedly poured more than a combined \$100 million out of their own pockets, largely, it seemed, in an attempt to attack and ridicule one another. The early estimate is that they will spend another \$300 million to repeat that exercise between now and Nov. 6.

Is there anything that we don’t already know about **Bruce Rauner** and J.B. Pritzker — the men themselves, their platforms and policy agendas — after the preliminary round? So here is a modest proposal: What if both candidates pledged not to run any television spots or plant posters on lawns between now and the fall? That is, zero campaigning, save for the requisite sit-downs with newspaper editorial boards, WTTW-sponsored debates, small non-fundraising gatherings, and going from door to door (without a television crew in tow to record the stops).

Instead, each would agree to donate \$100 million of his own money to Illinois charities, selected from a list of, say, a couple hundred organizations. In fact, maybe this could come in the form of a one-to-one matching challenge grant that private donors would contribute to and thus multiply the benefits. And it could change Chicago’s unofficial operating motto from “Where’s mine?” to “There’s mine, and mine is bigger than yours.”

In some political races, a dark horse or relatively new or unknown candidate might benefit significantly from being able to spend lavishly, ostensibly to get his or her name and face before the public. There are ample examples of this type of advertising in local, state, and national campaigns over time. And it was undoubtedly true for **Daniel Biss** and Jeanne Ives this year. Ceilings on allowable spending would work to the advantage of the better-known candidate(s) in the field, often the incumbent.

But in the case of Rauner and Pritzker they are — and were before the 2017-2018 campaign began — already household names. This was almost a perfect storm for the two of them (or the three of them if you add another millionaire, Chris Kennedy, to the mix.)

In a microcosm, it presents a game-theory example: Each candidate — Rauner and Pritzker — would be better off financially, and no worse off politically, if neither candidate spent a dime on advertising. It wouldn’t change the end result and they’d both have more money in their bank accounts. But if one of them spends \$100 million, then the other is forced into a non-cooperative situation and would also turn on the ad spigot. Working together — cooperating — with a very public pre-election agreement is in their and the state’s best interest. As close to a “free lunch” as we could get.

While true that \$300 million wouldn't come close to making a dent in Chicago's or the state's fiscal woes, it could potentially do some real good on micro-level projects of groups such as Chicago Coalition for the Homeless; Meals on Wheels; PAWS; Greater Chicago Food Depository; Salvation Army; legal clinics; and sponsors of after-school and neighborhood-youth programs. And to paraphrase or plagiarize a famous but misattributed quote to another famous Illinois political figure, Everett Dirksen, a million here, a million there, and pretty soon it's an amount that would matter to these worthy institutions and improve the quality of life in this state.

Then we can get back to watching more important commercials on television — for mattresses, automobiles, prescription medications and those personal-injury lawyers.

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