

Two billionaires to face off in race for governor of Illinois

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With all votes counted in Tuesday's primary election in Illinois, for the first time in the state's history, *two* billionaires—one Democrat and one Republican—will battle for the governor's mansion. It speaks volumes about the plutocratic character of US politics that the contest for the top political office in a state with nearly 13 million people is reduced to the "choice" between two of the state's two dozen billionaires.

Following in the footsteps of Trump, both billionaires, incumbent Republican Governor Bruce Rauner and Democrat J. B. Pritzker, are absurdly presenting themselves as "average guys" running against "out-of-touch" and "elite" opponents.

The falsity of these attempts to bridge the impassable gulf between the ruling class and the working people of the state was reflected in the low turnout, barely 20 percent of those eligible to vote. In a state with 9 million people of voting age, a few more than 1.2 million voted Democratic and just under 700,000 voted Republican. The turnout was low, although not as low as the 16 percent who turned out in 2014. Multiple reports noted that voter turnout among young people was especially poor.

Within the framework of the two-party system there was a distinct shift towards the Democrats, with 30 percent more voting in the Democratic primary compared to the last contested race, and 30 percent fewer voting in the Republican primary.

Pritzker, the winner of the Democratic primary for governor, thus seems likely to take both a majority of the vote in November, as well as a majority of the state's billionaires, since his family members, all heirs to the Hyatt Hotel fortune, include eleven individuals with that obscene level of wealth, including his sister Penny, who was secretary of commerce in the Obama administration.

Republican incumbent Rauner, whose fortune has apparently fallen slightly since he took office—he was left off the *Forbes* magazine billionaire's list for 2018—has the support of the wealthiest of the group, Ken Griffin of the Citadel hedge fund group, worth more than \$9 billion.

Pritzker, who is worth \$3.5 billion, won the Democratic nomination easily with 550,000 votes, just under 50 percent of the total. His two main rivals each won about a quarter of the vote: multimillionaire Chris Kennedy, of the Kennedy political family and until recently the chairman of the board of trustees at the University of Illinois, and Daniel Biss, a North Shore state senator backed by the remnants of the Bernie Sanders 2016 campaign organization.

Rauner, an investment banker, took fewer than 350,000 votes in the Republican primary, barely surviving a challenge from a far-right, anti-immigrant state representative Jeanne Ives, who had been endorsed by *National Review* magazine and enjoyed the financial support of right-wing businessman and political activist Dick Uihlein, who had formerly supported Rauner.

In both primaries, it was money that talked. Pritzker spent \$70 million to win the Democratic nomination, about \$127 a vote, while Rauner poured \$50 million into his campaign, about \$143 per vote. He overwhelmed Ives on television advertising, spending \$16.5 million to her \$2.9 million, a better than five-to-one margin.

In other contests, Kwame Raoul, the choice of the Chicago Democratic machine, beat former Illinois governor Pat Quinn and seven other lesser-knowns in the race for state attorney general.

A Chicago Teachers Union activist, Brandon Johnson, was elected to the Cook County Board for the

first district, running on the promise to oppose health care cuts and in support of Medicare for all.

Illinois is home to several closely watched races for the U.S. House of Representatives this year.

In the **Third Congressional District**, Marie Newman, backed by Bernie Sanders and abortion rights groups, fell short in a challenge to incumbent Democrat Dan Lipinski, a conservative “Blue Dog” who opposes abortion rights. Lipinski has served seven terms in the district after succeeding his father, a machine Democrat who held the seat for two decades. He had the support of most union officials as well as the Chamber of Commerce and right-wing anti-abortion groups, which spent heavily and flooded the district with paid canvassers and fliers. The Republican Party failed to field a candidate in its primary, allowing long-time white supremacist activist and Holocaust denier Arthur Jones to win the nomination unopposed.

In the **Fourth District**, former Cook County Commissioner and one-time mayoral candidate Jesus “Chuy” Garcia won easily in the majority Hispanic district. Garcia was tapped late last year to inherit this seat from retiring Representative Luis Gutierrez. A long-time Cook County machine politician, Garcia has been built up as a “progressive” in his challenge to Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel’s reelection in 2015.

The **Sixth District** in the Chicago northwest suburbs, currently held by Republican Peter Roskam, featured the highest spending of any congressional contest in the state. The two leading Democratic hopefuls, environmental scientist Kelly Mazeski and “green” capitalist Sean Casten, each spent nearly a million dollars in a six-candidate race. Casten, a multi-millionaire, appeared to have won the nomination by a narrow margin.

Military-intelligence operatives seeking Democratic congressional nominations posted split results. In the the **Twelfth District**, in southwest Illinois, St. Clair County State’s Attorney and Navy veteran Brendan Kelly had the support of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, which cleared the field for him and placed him in its highest priority “red-to-blue” program. Kelly, who served as an “observer” at Guantanamo show trials for the National District Attorneys Association, won the Democratic nomination without opposition, and will face Republican incumbent Mike Bost in November.

Thirteenth District, Jonathan Ebbett served four years as a naval intelligence officer, including on the staff of the US European Command in Stuttgart, Germany during the invasion of Iraq in 2003, lost the Democratic nomination to Betsy Dirksen Londrigan, a former staffer for Illinois Senator Dick Durbin and a distant relative of the longtime Republican US senator from Illinois, Everett Dirksen. Londrigan will oppose Republican incumbent Rodney Davis in the downstate district.

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