

Illinois governor's race the most expensive in US history

Alexander Fangmann
5 November 2018

As the 2018 midterm elections in the United States come to a close, it is becoming clear that it will break records as the most expensive non-presidential election on record. Total campaign spending is estimated to reach \$5.2 billion, only \$1.3 billion less than the 2016 elections, which featured a presidential race, and around \$1.5 billion more than the 2014 midterm elections.

Even measured against this mountain of campaign spending, the money being spent on the race for Illinois governor stands out, with more than \$284 million spent so far between the general election and primaries. This is outpacing what has until this point been the most expensive gubernatorial election campaign in US history, California's 2010 race between Democrat Jerry Brown and billionaire Republican Meg Whitman, later the CEO of HP.

J.B. Pritzker, the Democratic candidate for governor of Illinois, has spent \$161.5 million of his vast fortune on his own campaign, more than any other candidate in US history has ever spent in an attempt to win an office. He is outspending Governor Bruce Rauner, the Republican incumbent, by a nearly two-to-one margin. Rauner has spent \$50 million of his own money, as well as \$22.5 million he received from the state's wealthiest resident, hedge fund billionaire Ken Griffin, the founder of Citadel.

Pritzker, with a wealth of \$3.4 billion, is an heir to the Hyatt hotel fortune and one of at least 11 billionaires in his family. The Pritzkers are one of the richest families on the planet, and many of its members are deeply connected to the highest echelons of American business and government.

His sister, Penny Pritzker, was commerce secretary in the Obama administration from 2013 to 2017. His brother Anthony Pritzker is, aside from being an

investor and managing partner of the Pritzker Group, an advisor on Asia-Pacific policy at the RAND Corporation.

Thomas Pritzker, his first cousin, is executive chairman of Hyatt Hotels and chairman of the board for the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a major think tank for US imperialism. He is also chairman of North American Western Asia Holdings (Nawah), an investment firm with port and logistics operations in Iraq that he co-founded with Paul Brinkley, deputy undersecretary of defense under both George W. Bush and Obama.

Bruce Rauner is also likely a billionaire, or close to it, from the wealth generated by the private equity firm GTCR, in which he was a partner for many years. Though he has adamantly refused to divulge his actual net worth, a spokesman once described his wealth as "in the mid-nine figures," and his 2015 state tax return indicated \$188 million in taxable income.

The fact that nearly 82 percent of the spending has come from just three members of the financial aristocracy, two of them the candidates themselves, underscores the complete lack of popular support for the Democrats and Republicans among the overwhelming majority of the working class population. Moreover, it provides a guarantee, even more than usual, that whoever ends up as governor will be defending the interests of their own extremely narrow social milieu.

While Pritzker is heavily favored to win on November 6, concern about a low turnout in Illinois affecting candidates further down the ballot, due to the lack of popular enthusiasm for the billionaire candidate, likely accounts for the last-minute campaign visit to Chicago by former President Barack Obama on Sunday. The event, held at the UIC Pavilion, is

intended to drum up votes in close congressional elections in the Chicago suburbs, as well as in the Illinois attorney general race.

The main effect of all this campaign funding has been a nearly complete saturation of the media with campaign ads meant to conceal the shared commitment of both parties, regardless of which candidate wins on Tuesday, to continue and deepen the assault on the living standards and social conditions of the working class, particularly in regard to pensions and education spending.

Instead, the campaign ads have largely traded accusations of corruption and incompetence, accurate in themselves. Republicans denounced Pritzker for a scheme to avoid paying taxes on a mansion in Chicago's Gold Coast neighborhood by removing the toilets (so the value of the house could be downgraded). Democrats charged that Rauner attempted to cover up deaths from Legionnaire's disease that occurred at the state veterans' home in Quincy.

Despite Pritzker's refusal to state any concrete post-election plans and his lack of a popular base of support, he is expected to win comfortably, with polls predicting a two-digit margin of victory over Rauner. This is largely due to the widespread antipathy Rauner generated during his first term through his attempt to force through his "Turnaround Agenda," a collection of attacks on pensions, workers compensation and other social spending, which resulted in a budget impasse lasting over two years. The impasse caused layoffs and program cuts in social service and higher education throughout the state. In a recent campaign speech Rauner was unapologetic about the impasse and even described it as "a fight for reform."

Rauner also faced a challenge from the far right of the Republican Party, which attacked him over his signing of HB40, a bill that expanded coverage of abortions by the state's Medicaid program. Barely squeaking by a primary challenge from Jeanne Ives, a state legislator, who criticized him for supporting bills expanding rights for transgender individuals and immigrants, Rauner emerged from the primary badly damaged politically.

In the general election, he will also face another far-right challenger, former Republican Sam McCann, who is running under the Conservative Party banner. McCann, who represents an area around Springfield with many government workers, voted with Democrats

to override a Rauner veto, which ultimately ended the impasse. He has accused Rauner of being "the most liberal, progressive governor the state of Illinois has ever had."

Rauner supported the Illinois-based *Janus* case that was successful in the US Supreme Court in order to weaken the Democratic Party by attacking their funding source in public sector unions. By contrast, Pritzker has pledged his support to the union leadership. In fact, his family has long had a working relationship with the unions, through Unite Here, which has been working furiously throughout this campaign season to prevent a struggle by hotel workers from breaking free of their stranglehold and making serious demands on the hotel chains, including Hyatt.

In large measure, the real question in this election between the two main parties of the ruling class is whether they believe that the unions are needed to carry out the budget cuts and regressive tax increases on the agenda. The support for the Democratic Party by the unions, 30 of which backed the Pritzker campaign, including AFSCME and the Illinois Federation of Teachers, indicates they are ready and willing to help carry out the bipartisan agenda being worked out behind the scenes to continue the program of austerity.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact