

Illinois governor's race highlights the reactionary politics of both Democrats and Republicans

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Last Thursday evening, the billionaire incumbent governor of Illinois, Democrat J.B. Pritzker, and his Republican challenger, Darren Bailey, a millionaire businessman from Xenia, shared the stage in the first of two debates in advance of next month's midterm elections. Early voting began Friday in Illinois.

Pritzker is favored to win re-election by a wide margin and has been endorsed by the *Chicago Tribune*, which has supported every Republican gubernatorial candidate for more than 20 years. Bailey's campaign is buttressed by more than \$50 million from Dick Uihlein through a PAC operated by Dan Proft, the ultra-conservative activist behind a number of media outlets. Uihlein is the billionaire heir to the Schlitz brewing fortune.

The intervention of three billionaires in the governors race, one Democratic and two Republican, is making the Illinois governor's race the most expensive on record. Pritzker spent more than \$35 million during the Republican primary contest to ensure that Bailey, a fascist in all but name, won the GOP nomination for governor, beating out more moderate candidates.

This was part of a nationwide electoral strategy on the part of the Democrats based on the cynical calculation that they would fare better in the general election against extreme-right Republicans, including many endorsed by Donald Trump, than against less extreme ones. This has facilitated the transformation of the Republican Party into an openly fascistic organization. More than half of the Republican candidates standing in the November 8 elections, including Bailey, are election deniers who do not accept the legitimacy of the Biden administration.

The debate event itself was bitter and at times

chaotic. The candidates dodged questions in order to take pot shots at one another, but both candidates made crime a central point in their campaign.

Bailey, who refuses to acknowledge Joe Biden won the 2020 election, has the endorsement of the Illinois Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) as well as the Chicago FOP. He claimed that a rise in crime will result from the ending of cash bail in Illinois through the "SAFE-T" Act, which goes into effect on January 1, 2023.

The law limits the circumstances in which a judge can order pretrial detention and take into consideration the alleged crime and the accused's past history. It will likely reduce the number of people incarcerated before trial. It also permits judges to detain those accused of serious crimes instead of allowing them to be bailed out.

Bail reform has popular support since it is common in the US for those accused who cannot afford to post cash bail to remain locked up for long periods, sometimes weeks or months, including right up until their trial. The average pretrial detention is 34 days, according to Illinois State Police data analyzed by Loyola University of Chicago's Center for Criminal Justice Research.

Republicans also oppose the SAFE-T Act because it limits the predatory practice of using bail as a funding source. Some counties perversely rely on bail money to support their operations, and in the debate Bailey defended this status quo.

Pritzker defended the SAFE-T Act and his record of support for the police, saying, "If you want to reduce crime, you have to solve crime, and do what I've done. Which is to increase the number of state police, build state-of-the-art crime labs and make sure that we're

funding violence prevention.”

On the question of abortion, Bailey was asked whether he'd favor any exceptions for rape and incest victims, which he avoided answering by presenting the law as settled. He said, “Illinois has the most permissive abortion laws in the nation. Nothing's going to change when I'm governor. I couldn't change them.”

Pritzker then stated that Bailey wanted to eliminate a woman's right to choose. “He wants to take away women's reproductive rights,” the incumbent said.

Bailey's anti-abortion position is well known. He was asked about his 2017 comparison of abortion to the Holocaust during his campaign for a seat in the state House, in which he declared, “The attempted extermination of the Jews of World War II doesn't even compare on a shadow of the life that has been lost with abortion.”

In the November election, there are two open seats on the Illinois Supreme Court, currently made up of four Democrats and three Republicans. A judge's term is 10 years. According to Ballotpedia, Mark Curran, a Republican, once a sheriff in Lake County, later a senior prosecutor with the Lake County State's Attorney's Office and a special assistant to the US Attorney, will face Democrat Elizabeth Rochford, a circuit court judge in Lake County, just north of Chicago. In the other race, incumbent Republican Supreme Court Justice Michael Burke is facing a challenge from Appellate Court Justice Mary Kay O'Brien, who is a Democrat.

On the ballot in November is a constitutional amendment guaranteeing workers the right to select their representation and collectively bargain at work, to which Bailey said: “My message is this: Unions, stay in your lane and everything will be fine. Leave Mom and Pop and private business alone.”

Bailey said, “We're being crushed by property taxes, crime. We're being crushed by failed education, and it's all because J.B. Pritzker is hellbent on becoming the most radical leftist governor in America.”

In addition to a large farm business that produces corn, soy and wheat, Bailey operates an unaccredited private school, Full Armor Christian Academy, with locations in Illinois and Kentucky, where his wife is executive director. The school boasts of its heavily armed teachers and staff.

On gun violence, Pritzker declared, “I believe we ought to ban assault weapons and high capacity magazines in the state of Illinois.” Bailey responded semi-coherently: “The Highland Park shooting, it shouldn't have happened because of the laws that are on the books, but when Governor Pritzker doesn't follow or obey these laws, these things happen.”

After the Highland Park shooting, which killed seven and injured 48, Bailey stated on Facebook: “Move on and let's celebrate the independence of this nation.”

The Bailey campaign is being showered with support from the most right-wing sections of the Republican Party. At a Republican gala dinner in downstate Marion two days after the debate, Donald Trump Jr. stumped for Bailey. He said: “[W]e need a push for strong Republicans in all of these offices. Darren Bailey's in this room right now. You have a chance to do that here. If there's ever a chance you can unseat the lunatic in your governor's mansion right now, it's this year. Because people are looking at every little thing that's going on and they're saying, ‘What the hell is happening to our country?’”

Trump, Jr. employed threatening and violent political language at the event, saying, “We're sick of turning the other cheek. We're sick of the live-and-let-live while they're out there every day trying to destroy our values, our beliefs, our freedoms and our Constitution. Here in Illinois, get him to the governor's mansion. This is a war of attrition, guys, and like I said, every aspect of your existence is on the table.”



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