



Trip down Blago memory lane: Accident or fate?



Matt Dietrich
Reboot Illinois

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A Reboot Original

Google alerts can work in mysterious ways. Last week I got an alert about State Comptroller Judy Baar Topinka that I thought would contain a link to the latest report from her office spelling out how much farther behind the state is than in her last report. Instead, it was a link to a [2005 syndicated column](#) by Rich Miller of Capitol Fax that describes **Topinka's optimism for ousting Rod Blagojevich in the 2006 election. I know alert landed in my inbox by a random quirk in a Google search algorithm. But its timing – coming on the very day we were testing the Reboot Illinois website before its Nov. 19 launch – seemed anything but random. If not for Blagojevich's reign of error, Reboot Illinois might not exist.**

Reading this column in 2012 is a lot like watching a painful sports highlight over and over again. You know the result. It's history. But you still think of what might have been. (“He was out, Denkinger!!! Out!!!!”)

The column is about a poll conducted March 6-8, 2005, that showed Topinka trailing Blagojevich by only 3 percentage points. Worse for the governor, the poll found tepid voter approval for his performance in his first two years in office. Forty-eight percent of respondents said the state was on the wrong track.

“That kind of number is never good news for an incumbent, but, remember, it’s still early in the game and the governor has a gigantic campaign war chest,” Miller wrote. “The governor is expected to spend as much as \$25 million on his re-election campaign next year. That money will give him ample opportunity to run a Reagan-style ‘morning in America’ media blitz that constantly reminds voters that he kept his promise not to raise general taxes.”

As it turned out, Blagojevich spent \$26 million to defeat Topinka in 2006. And that “Morning in America” campaign Miller foresaw? It lives on thanks to youtube, mocking us all with every play. (“According to my opponent, I’m the worst person on Earth, and the world is coming to an end,” purrs the future Senate seat salesman.)

Knowing what we know now about what was going on behind the scenes in Camp Blago, it’s disorienting to return to a time when the “normal” rules of politics still applied to his campaign. My head spins watching the benignly clownish Blagojevich in that commercial and thinking of the malevolently profane figure in the FBI wiretaps a few years later.

Anyway, thanks to Google for providing an accidentally well-timed trip down memory lane.

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