

Sen. Bill Brady "In His Own Words"

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"In Their Own Words" 7th in a series
by Sen. Bill Brady "In His Own Words"

To commemorate RFFM.org's 15 years of service to the conservative community, we will be conducting a series of monthly interviews throughout 2007 with some of the most influential leaders in the pro-family/conservative movement. RFFM.org's national director, Daniel Zanoza, will conduct Q + A sessions with the aim of educating our readers as to some of the views held by those who work tirelessly to reach their stated goals.

The seventh interview in RFFM.org's series continues with Illinois state Sen. Bill Brady



State Sen. Bill Brady

"In His Own Words"

State Sen. Bill Brady, a mainstream conservative recognized for his state budgeting expertise and for challenging the status quo in government, has represented the citizens of seven Central Illinois Counties in the 44th Senate District since 2002. He previously served in the Illinois House of Representatives from 1993 to 2001.

Senator Brady currently is the ranking Republican on the Senate Insurance Committee, the leading Republican on the Senate Pensions and Investments Committee, and a member of the Revenue and Public Health committees. He also serves on the General Assembly's Commission on Government Forecasting and Accountability and is a member of the board that governs the state's CHIP (Comprehensive Health Insurance Plan) program.

A lifelong resident of Bloomington, Brady and his brothers have owned and operated real estate development, property management, mortgage, insurance, home construction and broadcasting businesses in Central Illinois for more than a quarter century.

Senator Brady graduated from Bloomington's Central Catholic High School and Illinois Wesleyan University. He and his wife, Nancy, have three children - Katie, William and Duncan - and will celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary later this year.-----

Q: Our readers can learn some things about you from the biography above, but there are some things that do not fit into a bio regarding personal motivations, etc. For example, what made you decide to pursue public service through elected office? What kind of impact would you like to have on our state and nation and what kind of legacy would you like to leave behind?

A. My parents always taught their children to be involved in their community and to contribute to society. I chose to give back a portion of the successes I have had through public service by helping to make the lives of others better. I got into government because of my frustration with Democratic policies that trap people into a cycle of government dependence and give them a false belief that government can cure all their ills. I know Illinois can do better, I know that Illinois families can do better when government sets an example of fiscal discipline and encourages personal responsibility.

Like many other parents, I want my children and grandchildren to choose to raise their families here in Illinois, and I want them to be able to afford to stay here and do just that. Every generation wants to leave a better life for the next generation, whether it's financial security through a strong economy, a cleaner environment through policies that protect our water, our air and our land, or a society that promotes new opportunity for self-development.

Q: In a state dominated by the Democratic Party, you have emerged as a leader of the conservative pro-family

movement and the Republican Party on the whole. In fact, many experts see you as one of the GOP's brightest hopes for the future. I know modesty would prevent you from acknowledging some of this evaluation, but to the best of your ability, please address some of the responsibilities that come with being one of the most recognizable politicians in the state.

A. Thank you. I am proud of the work I have done for families in Illinois, and I am humbled by the faith and trust that people from all walks of life have placed in me. One of the biggest challenges is staying focused on providing common-sense solutions to the challenges we face as a state. Rather than just attacking the easy, we must try to answer those difficult challenges with positive solutions that move Illinois forward.

Q: Every day we hear about the abuse of children and children being abducted. It seems to be a social disease that is sweeping our nation. You were instrumental in the state legislature addressing this problem through the consideration of "Jessica's Law" which is named after a 14-year-old Florida girl, Jessica Lunsford, who was abducted, raped, tortured and buried alive by a convicted sex offender. Obviously, this issue touches your heart. Can you talk about your personal thoughts concerning this subject and Jessica's Law as it is written in Illinois? In your opinion, what else can be done by legislators and the public to protect our most valuable and vulnerable treasure, our children?

A. There is nothing more important than protecting our most vulnerable citizens, our children. The horrendous torture and murder of Jessica Lunsford scorched our nation. Unfortunately, the brutal death of Jessica is not an isolated case. Far, far too many children and young adults are abducted and sexually molested every year in Illinois and in the country as a whole. Far too many sexual predators and molesters are released from prison and somehow manage to thwart the attention of our law enforcement community. Jessica's Law, first passed in Florida and now enacted by two dozen other states, will become law in Illinois with the signature of the Governor.

Simply put, the legislation passed by the General Assembly increases the prison sentences for these repeat sexual predators and gives law enforcement new tools to monitor them after their incarceration. It will upgrade criminal sexual assault to a Class X felony if the predator has previously been convicted of any sex offense; currently it is only a Class X felony if the offender had been previously convicted of criminal sexual assault. It also will change the conditions for the release of sex offenders by requiring them to take an annual polygraph exam, maintain a log of their travel and obtain prior approval of their parole officers before driving alone in a motor vehicle. It also requires convicted sexual predators who are subject to GPS monitoring to pay for the cost of monitoring.

Jessica's Law, which I was proud to introduce and sponsor, is another step toward making our children's world safer. I pray it will protect our children from the evils of predators and prevent future tragedies such as happened to Jessica and other girls and boys. As lawmakers, parents and citizens, however, we must recognize our own responsibilities to our youth. We must be ever vigilant about our children, our most precious resource. We must be aware of our children's activities, alert to their use of the Internet and watchful of their surroundings. We need to challenge ourselves to protect our children to the highest degree possible.

Q: Recently, some of the most contentious work dealt with by the Illinois Senate involves the end of the rate hike freeze for ComEd and Ameren customers which has led to some central and downstate residents having their electric bills tripled. By the time you are answering this question, the Senate may have come to an agreement regarding the power companies and what Illinois consumers can expect in the future. Could you share your feelings regarding the end of the rate hike freeze and the process which has led us to where we are today?

A. As you mention, the General Assembly has acted on this contentious issue, and the matter is now on the governor's desk. Unfortunately, I do not believe the so-called solution is in the best interests of Illinois consumers. Our citizens needed real rate relief in addition to a reliable supply of electrical power.

Our consumers suffered doubling and tripling of their electrical bills for months while the Democrats did nothing. Finally, in the eleventh hour of an overtime legislative session - not in January, not in March, not even in May -- did they think this was important enough to end the shell game of one chamber passing a bill unacceptable to the other and present a proposal drafted with precious little, if any, input from Republicans. The bill crafted by the Democratic Attorney General, the Democratic Speaker of the House and the Democratic President of the Senate does not offer real rate relief. It is a sell-out of our consumers who, two years from now, likely will see rates back exactly where they are today. This plan provides consumers \$1 billion over three years while it allows the power generating companies more than \$6 billion in windfall profits. It is not enough. I also voted against the bill because it creates a new government bureaucracy to deal with energy issues. We certainly do not need the Attorney General and a new Illinois Power Agency to determine utility rate issues; that's the responsibility of the Illinois Commerce Commission. Illinois consumers would have been better served by phasing in gradual rate increases. We need to do everything we can to ensure that Illinois has a reliable

source of energy, but it must be brought to the consumer in an affordable way, not by this ill-conceived measure.

Q: Illinois seems like it is in a perpetual budget crisis. Can you address why you think this is the case and what needs to be done to create some sort of fiscal responsibility in the state?

A. Illinois has both a revenue problem and a spending problem. This year, for example, while the General Assembly has met for 61 days in overtime sessions to date, Illinois has nearly an additional \$1 billion in natural revenue growth available. Nearly \$1 billion in new money. But it's not enough to satisfy the demands of many in the Democrat majority of the House and Senate. And it's not nearly enough to satisfy our Democrat governor who proposes new program after new program without the revenues to pay for them. No matter, he says. We'll raid the pension funds, we'll sell off the Thompson Center or the Lottery, we'll raise taxes on business, he says. We'll expand gambling and riverboats, says Senate President Jones. A modest income tax increase may be necessary, says Speaker Madigan. Rather than looking at how we spend our taxpayers' precious dollars, they want more. Rather than scaling back government and saying no, as Governor Edgar did in 1991, they expand government with new programs and new agencies. Rather than implementing a patient-centered care system for the state's Medicaid clients, they maintain an expensive status quo system...and don't pay health care providers adequately or on time. Until we rein in spending and voters demand a greater fiscal discipline, Illinois is going to have budget problems.

Like most families do, government needs to live within its means. I believe government needs to reorder its priorities. Government should not and cannot be all things to all people. I believe we need to say no to expensive new programs that sound good, but sap the state treasury. Should we make health care more accessible? Absolutely. Should the state spend billions of its resources to do it? Absolutely not. More government means less opportunity for our citizens. I believe we need to look at the budget top to bottom and determine how our tax dollars can best be spent to move Illinois forward while still providing a safety net for our citizens who need temporary assistance.

Q: It is apparent when it comes to the budget the only answers some legislators have is to increase taxes and fees or increase revenue from the expansion of gambling. Obviously, there are many conservatives who have a problem with both of these solutions--if they can be called solutions at all. And it seems like the problem exists every year. The schools need more money. The state's infrastructure crumbles while billions of dollars are spent yearly on these issues. In your opinion, where is the system breaking down?

A. It is breaking down because the Democrats who now control the House, the Senate and the Governor's office all believe in bigger government. They believe in a "feel good" government that promotes policies that entrap people into government assistance - at a higher cost for Illinois taxpayers. They believe in a tax system that will push jobs out of Illinois with burdensome taxes unseen in other states that understand that jobs translate into natural revenue increases for government. Tax increases are not the answer; aggressive economic development is. Illinois is the fifth largest state but, over the last five years, has become the eighth worst job-producing state in the nation. The 500,000 jobs we have lost to other states over the last five years would have generated an additional \$2 billion in revenues for Illinois. That growth that would have allowed Illinois to fund necessary programs, help pay our shameful unfunded pension liability, provide cost-of-doing-business increases for social service providers and offer tax relief to Illinois homeowners and taxpayers.

Q: Families balance their budgets all the time, while it is true many spend more income than they have coming in. Is this something that has become a part of our culture or is there another answer to this question?

A. Many of our families struggle to get by. They cinch up their belts, tighten their budgets and they make do. But I am concerned that overspending has become part of our culture for too many families. We have become a nation of borrowers. Saving for a rainy day just isn't part of the financial plan for too many of us, even when we have the financial resources to do so. And a big part of the blame for that falls directly on government in Springfield and in Washington, D.C. Our government should be an example of fiscal discipline to live by, not an example of overspending that encourages families to follow their ways. I'm also concerned that some Illinoisans believe they have somehow become entitled to government assistance, whether it's low-cost mortgages, financial aid for their children's college educations or other government aid programs, regardless of their household income. Those programs are essential for our less fortunate citizens; they are not essential for "where's mine?" families who have maxed out their credit cards on non-essential or extravagant purchases. Again, it's a question of personal discipline and sometimes - like government should do - of making do without the extras. And government certainly should not become a bigger part of the problem by raising taxes and taking more money from the already-stretched household budgets of many Illinois families and businesses.

Q: Anyone who follows politics knows you are pro-life and a friend to the pro-family movement. I'm sure these issues rank highly on your political agenda. However, what other issues do you see as pressing for the people of Illinois? Are there things that are flying underneath our collective political radar that should be given more

attention?

A. I don't believe there is any greater pro-family value than ensuring our citizens are able to provide for one's own family through a job. As I talked about earlier, the economic and tax policies of this administration have cost Illinois some 500,000 jobs. That's 500,000 families who are not enjoying the quality of life that a job provides. That's 500,000 families who right now don't have the opportunities they would have with a job here in Illinois. Instead of promoting job policies, this administration proposes the largest tax increase in the history of this nation - a gross receipts tax of \$7.6 billion - that would further undermine the economic strength of our state and the financial security of our families. This administration raises the minimum wage to the highest in the country, another effort that ultimately will cause business to take their business elsewhere. That's not the way to promote independence and financial security for our families; it's not the way to build a strong economy that guarantees a better quality of life for all our citizens.

Q: We have seen Illinois evolve from a state that was led by two political parties not too long ago. Today the Democrats dominate state government, even though many believe Illinois is not that liberal. From a positive standpoint, what does the Republican Party need to do to get back on even footing in Illinois?

A. Republicans did not fare well last November. As a result, the Democrats control every element of state government. But let's remember that a decade ago, Republicans held every statewide office and had majorities in both the Illinois Senate and Illinois House. So, the pendulum swings. But there are some things I think the Republican Party can do to ensure that pendulum quickly swings back to GOP control. I believe we need to go back to the values and principles of Abraham Lincoln - responsive and limited government, low taxes, personal responsibility. We Republicans must stand for integrity and ethics, policies that invite and encourage business growth and job creation, and tax strategies that reduce the burden on our citizens. I believe a majority of Illinoisans would agree with those priorities, yet we must become better messengers of that agenda. The Republican Party must reach out to all areas of Illinois voters with that message, including Reagan Democrats, independents who are fiscally conservative, and minorities. Nearly a quarter of the vote cast for governor last November was cast by Latino and African-American voters, yet our candidate for governor received only 14 percent of that vote. Minorities by and large are church-going, pro-family citizens who share our Republican philosophy. We need to make them feel welcome in the Republican Party.

Q: We've addressed some serious topics in this Q + A so far, so let's get on the lighter side, if we can. What do you do to relax? Do you have any hobbies or family activities that you really enjoy?

A. Because I spend a great deal of time away from home on legislative and political matters, Nancy and I try to make time with family and close friends a priority, whether it's visiting our daughter in Pennsylvania or cheering our two sons at their athletic games. I like debating politics and discussing current events over friendly dinners, reading, hunting and bicycling. I also enjoy getting out on the golf course, though it will take a while to get my game back after spending two months of summer in overtime session in Springfield.

Q: Your name is constantly being mentioned for higher office. I don't expect you to make an announcement regarding future political plans here--even though it would make for a great exclusive--but I would be remiss if I did not take a shot at it. So, here goes. Can we expect Bill Brady to be running for the U.S. Senate or Governor in the near future?

A. I have been very fortunate to be able to be a voice for Central Illinois residents in the General Assembly over the past 15 years. I treasure that experience and the many friendships I have made through my service in Springfield. As I traveled the entire state of Illinois in seeking the Republican nomination for Governor in 2006, I heard firsthand the dreams and the disappointments of the citizens of Illinois. I know some of their challenges can be resolved only with the leadership of a Governor working in a cooperative spirit with the legislature. Some of the things I want to accomplish for the people of Illinois can only be accomplished as Governor.

Right now I am focusing on my re-election as the state senator for the 44th district next year and offering my assistance to Senator Fred Thompson's bid for the Republican nomination for President, and I hope to be in a position to offer my vision for the future of Illinois to our citizens during following campaigns.

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Posted by Dan Zanoza at 12:08 AM in "In Their Own Words"