

A tale of two Democrats

Will local voters be swayed by love for Obama or dislike for Blagojevich?

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It is the best of times and the worst of times for Democrats, both in DuPage and throughout Illinois.

Barack Obama, the hometown celebrity who is now favored by polls to win the presidency, makes the title of "Democrat" one that party members seem proud to bear. But when it comes to Illinois' wildly unpopular Democratic governor and his colleagues, the association is undesirable.

The contrast begs the question of whether perceptions of Obama or Gov. Rod Blagojevich will exert more influence on DuPage voters who are learning toward Democratic candidates. According to Stephen Maynard Caliendo, associate professor of political science at North Central College, the national ticket will have greater pull.

"I don't think there's going to be much of a Blagojevich effect in this election," Caliendo said. "Obama is at the top of the ticket, both figuratively and literally. If there's any effect of partisanship, it will be pro-Democratic."

That's because voters are paying more attention to larger issues of where the country is headed and less attention to local problems, Caliendo said.

"Even though there's news out of Springfield, it's far out-shadowed by news at the national level," he said. "When (voters) go into the voting booth, they're going in to vote for president."

Only the states of New York and Delaware contain more enthusiastic Obama voters than Illinois, according to state polling averages reported by RealClearPolitics.com. An average of four recent polls compiled on the Web site shows Obama winning 58 percent of the vote in Illinois to McCain's 34 percent.

The statewide Obamania could push DuPage County over to the Democratic camp for the first time in recent history. Whether or not that happens, it is clear that Obama is extremely popular in the traditionally Republican county - which he carried by 64 percent in his 2004 senatorial race.

Caliendo said it should be noted that Obama's solid win in the election may also be attributed to the unpopularity of Republican candidate Alan Keyes. Still, he said he "wouldn't be shocked" if Obama won DuPage County on Tuesday, although he expects McCain to win in the county by a close margin.

Harris Fawell, former congressman for the 13th Congressional District, is backing a Democrat for president for the first time in his life. The 79-year-old Republican said there's a good chance that Obama will carry the county.

"He's the best I have seen, the most qualified I've ever seen running for president," Fawell said.

Beyond riding the wave of Obama-generated energy, Democrats are more active in the

county this year than ever before, contesting 75 percent of the 39 races throughout the county. Holding \$80,127 in its coffers, the DuPage County Democratic Central Committee has raised more than half of the \$154,024 possessed by its Republican counterpart, according to Oct. 5 filings with the state board of elections.