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Illinois politicians can't play 'name game'

[Comment on this story](#)By Scott Reeder, sreeder@qconline.com

SPRINGFIELD -- Just what's in a name?

Quite a bit if you are an aspiring Illinois politician.

Yes, the land that produced "Honest Abe" also has spawned its share of ballot scofflaws -- folks who change their name to something more pleasing to the average voter's ear.

Recently, with the sweep of a pen, Rod Blagojevich -- the governor with the longest, most difficult to pronounce name in the state's history -- tried to reform the ballot name game.

Under the new law, candidates who change their names within three years of an election will have to include a "formerly known as" line on the ballot. The only exceptions are politicians whose family status has changed, such as through a marriage or divorce.

"I think the fact that we have passed this into law will act as a deterrent to people doing this. That was the intention. We wanted to stop the deliberate deception of voters," the bill's sponsor, Rep. John Fritchey, D-Chicago, said.

This is hardly an abstract problem.

According to press accounts, Frederick S. Rhine acknowledged he was gaming the system when he changed his name to Patrick Michael O'Brien to improve his chances of

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being elected Cook County judge.

Chicagoans have a long history of preferring candidates with Irish surnames so Rhine/O'Brien as well as several other candidates for judgeships over the years have sought the love of the Irish.

But the name game doesn't end there. Current state law prohibits candidates from disclosing academic credentials on the ballot, much to the chagrin of Harvard-educated Sen. Christopher Lauzen, CPA, who sought to be elected state comptroller in 1998.

When election officials wouldn't allow him to note that he was a certified public accountant on the ballot, Sen. Lauzen attempted to have his last name legally changed to "CPA," but a judge refused to allow the name change.

"I received bad advice -- it was a mistake. I was trying to use my point-of-sale marketing skills and let voters know I'm a CPA. I worked hard to become an accountant. I tried to use that to my advantage," a rather embarrassed Sen. Lauzen said this week.

"In a perfect world, a law like this shouldn't be necessary," Rep. Fritchey said. "But this is just an attempt to reduce the number of games in a selection process that is already rife with gamesmanship."

While politicians usually deny political motivations behind a name change, more than a few have altered their moniker before having it placed on a ballot.

For example, 1984 Democratic presidential hopeful Gary Hart changed his name from Hartpence before he entered public life.

In 2000, Minnesota Supreme Court hopeful Greg Wersal incorporated his wife's maiden name into his ballot name so he could run as Greg Carlson Wersal. He lost the election, but some think the "Carlson" handle helped him in the state with many people of Scandinavian ancestry.

In fact, Minnesota's high-profile former governor used his wrestling stage name rather than his real name on the ballot. Jesse Ventura's actual name is Jim Janos.

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Posted by **Smiddy** from **East Moline** at 6:19PM on Saturday, 2/10/07

Does this mean that soon Blago will be listed with his federal inmate number, aka rod blagovich?

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