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Quinn 'has mellowed,' ready to be gov: ex-critics

SPRINGFIELD | Some embrace former outsider despite flaws

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Would it just mean two more years of political battles and posturing in Springfield? Or has Pat Quinn mellowed into a statesman who can get things done?

If Gov. Blagojevich resigns, is impeached, or appoints himself senator, taking over for him will be Quinn, his "Odd Couple" lieutenant governor.

Blagojevich was an old-school insider and Quinn came up the ranks as a "populist" outsider, throwing rocks at the castle walls and sometimes scoring direct hits against Illinois' political establishment.

But over the years, as Blagojevich has alienated more officials in Springfield, even some former Quinn critics have become willing to embrace him as an alternative to Blagojevich, willing to forgive him for what they once decried as his demagoguery.

"You know, he has mellowed out over the years, and the work he has done on the behalf of veterans has really won him admiration," said former Senate President Phil Rock.

Quinn's critics who still remember him as a demagogue who got a third of the state Legislature cut with his referendum to reduce the size of government in 1980 say he'll have some of the same downsides as Blagojevich – a preference to talk to news cameras instead of doing the hard work of negotiating with fellow legislators.

But Rock and others say Quinn will be ready to step into the role.

"I think he'll be a whirlwind of energy," said Cook County Commissioner Forrest Claypool, a former Quinn aide. "He will take up some of the issues that have been ignored for the past decade. He will work effectively with members of the General Assembly to build consensus."

"I think he will work with the Legislature, not against it as the governor has done," said state Rep. John Fritchey (D-Chicago), who is working on an impeachment bill.

Quinn is legendary among staffers for his work ethic, his disorganization, and his ability to stay on-task.

"His organizational style is eccentric; however, it works for him," said one former staffer. "Anyone who has worked for Quinn will tell you about the little pieces of white paper. Whenever he has an idea, which is about every 30 seconds, he scribbles it on a piece of white paper ... and you better make it happen because he does not forget."

Impeachment would have to clear House Speaker Mike Madigan, who may be reluctant to allow Quinn the status of incumbent during the 2010 governor's race in which Madigan's daughter, Attorney General Lisa Madigan, says she is "seriously considering" running.

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