



Kirk  
Dillard

## Daily Chronicle questionnaire: Kirk W. Dillard

**Election primary:** Illinois governor (Republican)

**Hometown:** Chicago

**Bio:** Legislative director to Gov. Jim Thompson; chief of staff to Gov. Jim Edgar; Illinois State Senator since 1994; Judge for the Court of Claims; Partner at Locke Lord Bissell & Liddell in Chicago; bachelor of arts from Western Illinois University; J.D. from DePaul University College of Law.

**Gov. Rod Blagojevich vowed to clean up corruption in a state famous for it, but instead became the fifth governor to be indicted in recent history, and the first ever to be impeached. What do you plan to do to clean up Illinois government?**

We must end “pay-to-play” politics and put an end to the era of embarrassment here in Illinois. We need to open the windows at the state capitol and let in some fresh air so we clean up the ethical mess that’s made us a punch line for late night talk shows. And so, I will lead by example on ethics reform. When I take the oath of office, I will shut down my campaign fund. The state is in crisis, and I’ll spend all of my time governing, not fundraising. No other candidate is offering this kind of transformational leadership. I also support the Collins Commission recommendations including a limit on campaign contributions and as governor would sign them into law.

**Is an increase in the state income tax necessary to help balance the budget? Any other tax increases? Why or why not?**

As a state senator, I have never supported an across-the-board tax increase. As governor, I will veto all new spending programs and review every program and expenditure under a microscope and conduct a thorough audit of state government before taxes or fees should even be considered. The state of Illinois needs to balance its budget and live within its means like our families and businesses. The flat rate income tax is one of Illinois’ competitive advantages and should remain in place. Illinois has a large number of local government units – almost four times the national state average – and most are independent taxing bodies. When taken together, the impact of all local and state taxes is significant. As chief of staff to former Gov. Edgar, we inherited a mountain of debt in a recession and not only balanced the budget, but left a \$1.5 billion dollar surplus, without raising the state income tax.

**What specific spending cuts do you propose to help balance the state’s budget?**

As governor, first we will stop the bleeding by vetoing new spending programs that Illinois cannot afford. During my administration, we will use zero-based budgeting. Cuts include modernizing the state’s pension system, which the Civic Federation projects will save the state’s pension liability by \$162 billion over the long term and cutting waste and fraud from Medicaid, which can save more than \$1 billion annually. The Civic Federation estimates that moving long-term care patients with mental illness to Medicaid-eligible facilities could produce up to \$700 million more in federal matching funds. An additional \$400 million can be saved in one year and up to \$2.2 billion over five years by using smarter technology, improving vendor and contract management and processing benefits eligibility according to the Civic Committee. I also would eliminate free public transit rides for seniors, which only forces the RTA to look for more revenue from the state.

**Any attempt to balance the state budget will be difficult without addressing reform of the state pension system. How do you plan to do so?**

Illinois has an \$80 billion unfunded liability which is the worst-funded pension system in the country. It is simply unsustainable, a threat to the state’s financial solvency, and detrimental to job creation and growth. I support creating a two-tiered pension system that creates a new, more affordable plan for new state workers. The Constitution does not allow pension benefits to change for current and retired state employees. The current system will bankrupt the state. Workers and their unions must understand that their future benefits will be put at risk if the system winds up before a bankruptcy judge. There should be a moratorium on increased benefit changes – i.e. no new benefits until the pension system has achieved the 90 percent funded ratio. We should place a cap on the number and value of public pensions a person may receive and we will revamp cost of living adjustments.

**The state Legislature recently passed a campaign finance reform bill that for the first time in Illinois caps the amount of money that individuals and businesses can donate to candidates for state office, with some exceptions. What do you think of the legislation?**

I agree with the Northwest Herald, which called the bill “a brilliant money laundering scheme in the guise of reform” and said the bill’s loophole is “large enough to drive a truckload of campaign dollars through.” I opposed this reform bill proposed by Democrat leadership because it failed to place limits on legislative leaders and political party donations in general elections. In effect, this bill will not change the playing field or culture of corruption in Illinois. As governor, I will lead by example and build upon the ethics reforms I have already passed, the first major reforms in 25 years which allows you to see contributions online. I recently proposed a new ethics package which, among other things, includes my pledge to shut down my campaign fund as governor until I decide if and when to announce my intent to run for re-election.

**What will you do to promote job creation in Illinois?**

Balancing the state’s budget and creating jobs will be my top priority. It is a travesty that one in every nine Illinoisans is currently without work and the means to support their family. My comprehensive “Destination Illinois” job creation plan will stabilize and grow our economy by providing targeted tax breaks for employers, lowering intrinsic costs like workers’ compensation, investing in education and workforce development, eliminating government red tape, and making the state live within its means. I understand that private business, not government, creates jobs and investment. Our last two governors have demonized businesses and only viewed them as cash cows to finance government largesse. We need a long-term economic development vision for every region in the state of Illinois – like the Burnham Plan – which will create a sustainable vision for the state for future leaders. I believe I have the vision and transformational leadership experience to make Illinois a “Destination Economy.”

**Why are you the best candidate to lead this state for the next four years?**

Illinois is in crisis and on the edge of an economic disaster. At this critical time in our state’s history, we need a leader with experience and vision to balance the state budget and grow jobs. Governor is not an entry-level job. I have a unique blend of executive and legislative experience that will enable me to lead the state during this difficult period. My jobs plan shows a commitment to detail and bold that sets me apart from the other candidates. We simply must think differently about how we run state government so that we can balance our budget, restore fiscal and ethical integrity and attract new, high-paying jobs. I sponsored the most aggressive ethics reforms in 25 years and will end “pay-to-play” politics. I sponsored truth-in-sentencing, helped bring a Fortune 50 company to Illinois, and helped Governor Edgar balance the budget without raising taxes.

**Distinguish yourself from the other candidates in this race.**

I have the unique experience to lead this state, having served 16 years in the state Senate, as chief of staff for Gov. Edgar in a recession and as a member of the court of claims. This experience has taught me how to tackle the complexities of state government, how to work across the aisle and with people from all walks of life and most important, how to say “no.” I am proud to have been endorsed by Gov. Edgar, who recognized that I am best suited to govern this state, particularly in times of economic crisis. My “Destination Illinois” jobs plan is the most comprehensive and detailed plan from any candidate in the race. We need solid plans – not platitudes – from our next governor. Illinois voters deserve results and action and I am best equipped to move Illinois forward.

**Why should voters trust you to fix this state’s many problems?**

Voters should look at what I’ve said and done in the past. My record in the legislature shows a commitment to getting things done not only for my district but for the entire state. I have sponsored such measures as the Safe to Learn Act, major ethics reform, the bill to lure Boeing’s corporate headquarters to Chicago and the bill to require DNA testing of all felons. My experience, temperament and knowledge of state government enable me to make commitments I know I can keep. Finally, Gov. Edgar’s endorsement sends a strong message that he not only supports me but believes in me.