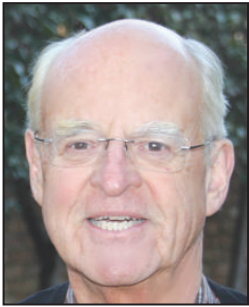


Commentary

What Kinzinger vs. Trump tells us about the Illinois GOP

By JIM NOWLAN

Kinzinger, Trump, Big Money, the GOP — a lot to handle in one column. But I can do it, because each is a different-



Nowlan

colored thread in a single piece of cloth. North-central Illinois GOP Congressman Adam Kinzinger has been sharply dismissive of former President Trump, which has caused furious blowback from his constituents. “Our district offices can barely function,” said one staffer, “as the circuits have been overloaded with irate calls from former supporters.” In a recent vote of LaSalle County GOP precinct committeemen, 88 percent supported censure of the five-term, 43-year-old congressman. “Adam went to Washington,” said a friend of mine from his district, “and never came back.” Indeed, during the 2020 election cycle, when I was on the hustings, I had a beer after the speechifyin’ with LaSalle County GOP Chair Larry Smith. He grumbled then that Kinzinger “hasn’t been in LaSalle County in six years!”

So, Adam has become the darling of suburban Dems and maybe 15-20 percent of GOP voters who, like me, agree with his criticism of Trump. Not a recipe for success in a statewide primary for U.S. Senate or governor, unless he stirs up several opponents, and can then win with 30 percent or so of the vote. Trump loyalists in my rural area appear to be sticking with the ex-president. They believe he speaks their blunt language to the powers that be and represents them more effectively than anyone ever has or ever will. Their loyalty to him is fierce; to the GOP, their faithfulness is secondary, if at all. For the near term, Trump needs a big objective, and that has to be the presidency in 2024. He will seek to become the first non-successive, two-term president since Grover Cleveland. But the Trump Party, post-insurrection, will always be a minority in America, probably 35 percent or so of voters. GOP officials are desperate to make their party more than the Trump Party, but Trump will make that nigh impossible. Trump is a cult figure, not a party leader. If you’re not for him 100 percent, you’re against him, to his mind. GOP candidates will have to pass the Trump loyalty litmus test, or face his wrath and that of his base.

In Downstate Illinois, Trump loyalty from candidates will come easy, and be mostly sincere. It will certainly be required to avoid a primary challenge next spring. I think the loyalty test will be trickier in the vote rich suburbs. I expect many district-level GOP primary contests between pro- and anti-Trump candidates. Also here in Illinois, Big Money appears to have replaced party organizations as the critical element in election contests. Gov. JB Pritzker and billionaire investor Ken Griffin each put more than \$50 million into the single contest over whether to tax the rich more than others, which Pritzker favored and lost. Without Griffin’s money to blanket the airwaves with trenchant advertising attacks on increased taxation, Pritzker would likely have won. Pritzker is vulnerable to defeat in a 2022 re-election bid. But who will credibly take on him and his money? (The governor spent \$171 million of his own money in his election win in 2018.) The answer is only someone who can find a Daddy Warbucks funder of the Ken Griffin class. Not to be cast aside entirely, the Illinois GOP (last month) narrowly defeated a Trump conservative, and elected as state chair a calm, mainstream Republican lawyer from the remarkably successful Tracy family of western Illinois. Tracy siblings operate and

wholly own the 6,000-employee DOT Foods enterprise of tiny Mount Sterling in equally miniscule Brown County. Don Tracy may not himself be in the Griffin billionaire class (I don’t know), but he sure has the stature to get his phone calls returned from traditional, major GOP donors. At present, the Illinois GOP holds no state offices and but one-third of legislative and congressional seats. It has no money, and an uncomfortable, at best, relationship with the Trump base; after all, the Tracy forces worked hard to eke out a narrow win over a Trump candidate for party chair. Illinois needs a competitive two-party political system. I commend Don Tracy for taking on a thankless role, but I worry that the GOP, both nationally and in Illinois, is in for a rough ride until we get past the Trump era. Trump backer and suburban businessman Gary Rabine has already announced his candidacy for governor in the 2022 GOP primary. Expect more. Will Kinzinger join the fray? Stay tuned.

For many years, Jim Nowlan was a senior fellow and political science professor at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign. He has worked for three unindicted governors and published a weekly newspaper in central Illinois.

Dental care in Illinois ‘safe and essential’ during the pandemic

By ERIC LARSON

The patients calling into our dental offices are understandably nervous. They ask important questions: What will my visit be like during COVID-19? Will I be safe? Fortunately, we have been ready for these challenging times for many years. All across Illinois, dental offices are welcoming patients back for care they put off this spring when coronavirus forced them to shutter to all but emergency treatment. As cases surge again this fall and government officials put in necessary restrictions, our message is clear: Dental care is safe, essential and must continue because it is a valuable part of our individual and collective public health. In the early 1980s, the emergence of HIV and AIDS forced all health care providers to take extra precautions – especially in dental offices, where potential exposure from the nature of the oral care we provide is highest. Detailed infection prevention strategies

were developed, our staffs and dentists went through comprehensive training and education, and we embraced safety standards by the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration. Today, the protective masks, gloves and gowns we have been wearing all this time and the strict attention to cleaning and disinfecting has become commonplace in health care facilities as we all fight this insidious disease. While our dental offices closed for a few weeks initially, both our industry experts and government officials agree it’s not only misguided to consider seeing the dentist a safety or health care risk as the pandemic continues, it does more harm to skip such care. Put simply, our mouths are a window to our entire body’s health. When our mouths and gums are healthy, we see the benefits. But when we let our oral health suffer, even if we do not notice any obvious signs of problems, they are sure to develop. Chipped or

cracked teeth, cavities, sore or bleeding gums can lead to many larger issues. If oral infection spreads throughout the body, research has shown it can contribute to dementia, heart disease and other life-threatening health challenges. Not only can minor dental issues become major ones over time, they also are sure to be more costly to fix. In implementing infection prevention and control guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, we have stepped up during the pandemic to show patients we are serious about their safety and health. When you call to set up an appointment, you’re asked detailed health questions and again when you arrive. We have you call before you come in the office for your appointment, wear your mask and take your temperature. Patients wait in their vehicles or in our socially distanced waiting rooms that no longer have toys or magazines but plenty of hand sanitizer – all to put safety first. Even in the dental chair you notice the

difference. Our dentists and assistants have even more masks, gloves and other coverings to reduce exposure. We thoroughly scrub down chairs, utensils and other equipment before and after each visit. We have developed a purchasing program through the Illinois State Dental Society to ensure our members have adequate supplies of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to keep everyone safe and healthy. A summer survey of dentists nationally by the American Dental Association found our efforts are working, as fewer than 1 percent of dentists had contracted the virus. A recent ADA article noted the CDC reports there have been no documented cases of COVID-19 transmission in a clinical dental setting. Dental care is safe. Dental care is essential. And dental care should be here to stay throughout the pandemic. Our public health depends on it.

Eric Larson is executive director of the Illinois State Dental Society in Springfield.

Judicial task force committed to pretrial reform efforts in Illinois

By ROBBIN STUCKERT

Comprehensive, sustainable reform takes courage, patience, diligence and faith. Building upon the Bail Reform Act of 2017, the General Assembly recently passed additional reforms of the state’s pretrial detention system. Importantly, the legislation includes a delayed effective date on many of its key provisions. This additional time will be critical to establish an effective statewide pretrial system to support these changes and ensure that individuals who pose a threat to public safety are detained pretrial. The Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Pretrial Practices recognizes that for far too long our criminal justice system has criminalized poverty by often detaining low-level, nonviolent offenders simply because they cannot afford bail. A large percentage of accused persons

who enter the criminal justice system are indigent, facing economic obstacles. The General Assembly is commended for addressing these difficult issues. In December 2017, the Illinois Supreme Court took the unprecedented step of creating and convening the Supreme Court Commission on Pretrial Practices, a multidisciplinary body comprised of criminal justice stakeholders from all three branches of government. The commission was charged with providing guidance and recommendations regarding comprehensive pretrial reform in the Illinois criminal justice system. The Supreme Court’s directive placed Illinois among the leaders in a long and overdue national movement to rethink and improve effective and fair bail decisions and enact transformative pretrial practices. The commission met for two years, studied national best practices, con-

sulted pretrial reform experts from across the nation, held public forums, and collected feedback from stakeholders throughout Illinois. The commission issued its Final Report in April 2020 which contained a broad range of legislative and policy recommendations to bring about pretrial reform in Illinois. Last summer, the Supreme Court established a task force to implement these recommendations. The task force, like the commission, is bipartisan and multidisciplinary. It has met biweekly since its creation. Members of the task force were also in discussion with legislators and advocates regarding proposed criminal justice reform legislation. While we may not have agreed on everything, we listened to one another and worked to align the pretrial aspects of this bill as much as possible with the recommendations in

the commission’s Final Report. I was honored to provide testimony before the Illinois House and Senate during subject matter hearings regarding HB3653. Going forward, the Supreme Court has directed the task force to assume a leadership role regarding the implementation of this historic and courageous legislation. We will prepare guidance and training on the bill’s pretrial provisions and will identify areas in the bill for which amendatory language must be considered. We look forward to continued dialogue with the legislative authors and we will work tirelessly to ensure comprehensive and sustainable pretrial reform is implemented throughout Illinois.

Robbin Stuckert is presiding judge, 23rd Judicial Circuit chair, Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Pretrial Practices.