



SPURRING A SPRINGFIELD EXODUS

CHANGING THE CONVERSATION

2017 marked the beginning of the second year of Illinois' budget impasse. And as pressure mounted, Illinois politicians, civic groups and the media claimed it was impossible to fix the state's fiscal and economic mess without a multibillion-dollar tax hike.

To counter this narrative, our partner wrote an alternative budget showing not only that it was possible to balance the budget without tax increases, but it was the moral thing to do. And our team aggressively pushed it in the media. Overall, we had 114 media placements highlighting their budget plan, including coverage from the state's largest radio station, most widely circulated newspaper and most influential newspaper at the capitol.

It resonated. In fact, we commissioned a poll that found despite the pain of the two-year budget impasse, less than one-third of Illinoisans supported raising taxes.

FIGHTING THE TAX HIKE

As the year wore on, pressure continued to mount to pass a compromise budget plan. And over Independence Day weekend, the General Assembly passed a budget package that included a 32 percent state income tax increase. The governor immediately vetoed this plan, but the legislature quickly overturned his veto, thus passing the largest permanent tax increase in state history.

But our team was able to incite widespread outrage, turning the tax hike into an animating point for the public. Despite the vote occurring over a holiday weekend, we achieved unprecedented levels of engagement. Over the seven days leading up to the override vote,

PARTNER NAME: Illinois Policy

LOCATION: Chicago

GOAL: Establish mechanisms to keep lawmakers accountable to their constituents.

RESULTS: Following unpopular tax hike votes, 34 lawmakers either resigned or will not seek reelection – an unprecedented turnover.

STRATEGY: A strong content push, over a holiday weekend no less, enabled our team to engage with more than 40 percent of the state's population and led to tens of thousands of emails going to lawmakers in the time surrounding the tax hike votes.

we connected with more than 40 percent of the state's population with messages of reform while lawmakers debated the tax hike. One video we distributed, showing a state lawmaker railing against the tax hike, received over 2.2 million views. More than 100,000 people used a tax hike calculator created by our partner, which allowed Illinoisans to see how the tax hike would affect their family's tax bill. And most importantly, we directed over 37,000 taxpayers to contact their lawmakers during the same time period.

CREATING MECHANISMS OF ACCOUNTABILITY

From the very beginning, our goal was to help our partner establish mechanisms of accountability – those who seek to put Illinois on a path to prosperity should succeed, and those who threaten it should fail. That's why we built a comprehensive "Take Action" platform that empowered Illinoisans to easily find and contact their lawmakers. This also enabled our team to target calls to action to the swing districts identified by the partner's government affairs team.

Following the summer's tax hike fight, those mechanisms brought historic change to Springfield.

Nine of the 15 Republicans who voted for the tax hike have announced they will not run for re-election. Another lost a primary election. An additional 24 lawmakers have either resigned their seats or will not be holding on to their seats in the next General Assembly.

This is an exodus unlike anything Illinois insiders have ever seen. And it has reaffirmed our partner as a powerful influencer on behalf of average Illinoisans.

MEDIA IMPACT

Our research and the effects of our marketing efforts putting people in touch with their lawmakers received a lot of attention from the media. In total, our coverage of the budget and tax hike received 304 earned media hits, including appearances on Fox Business, Fox Chicago, ABC Chicago, and WGN Chicago.

PRINT: 196 MENTIONS

RADIO: 35 MENTIONS

TV: 73 MENTIONS

“SOCIAL MEDIA AND MONEY HAS HAD A MAJOR IMPACT, AND THE CAMPAIGNS ARE NOT GETTING ANY NICER. AND THEY WON'T ... SO YOUR SKIN'S GOT TO BE EVEN TOUGHER THAN IT WAS TWO YEARS AGO TO WITHSTAND A CONTESTED PRIMARY OR A GENERAL ELECTION.”

Illinois Republican House Minority Leader Jim Durkin

“I HAVE A TON OF RESPECT FOR WHAT [ILLINOIS POLICY INSTITUTE CEO JOHN] TILLMAN HAS BEEN ABLE TO ACCOMPLISH. HE TOOK A SMALL WONKY GROUP AND TURNED IT INTO ONE OF THE MOST FEARED ORGANIZATIONS IN THIS STATE. THE FACT THAT HIS GROUP HAS BEEN ABLE TO CONNECT WITH SO MANY PEOPLE SHOULD BE A MODEL FOR EVERYONE ELSE.”

Statehouse Journalist Rich Miller, CapitolFax