

AS IT IS: C'mon guys, let's talk

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When I came into work Thursday, one of the first things I did was file a request for one of our photographers to attend the legislative candidates forum on Tuesday.

I requested the main photo be of the state representative candidates. This is that barn burner of a race between state Rep. Andy Skoog, D-La Salle, and Jerry Long, R-Streator.

These guys have yet to share a stage, and it's about time they do.

But they're not going to — at least not on Tuesday.

A few hours after turning in the photo assignment, I found out Long decided he wouldn't attend after all, even though he confirmed he would participate a month ago. Instead, he'll attend a meet-and-greet event in Putnam County.

For some reason, Long sees the meet-and-greet as more important than a candidate forum. Nothing against Putnam County, but a forum is far more valuable than a meet-and-greet. This is where candidates take questions on the issues; we can see how they think on their feet without the aid of staff and spinmeisters.

It's especially ironic that Long spurned a chance to face off with Skoog in Ottawa, one of the sites of the Lincoln-Douglas debates.

For the last couple months, the two political parties have spent tens of thousands of dollars on highly deceptive attack mailers and TV ads in the 76th House District. But the public gets few chances to ask them questions.

Both Long and Skoog pass themselves as regular guys, and they are to an extent. Both of them mow their own lawns, I'm told.

But with their spokesmen, talking points and mounds of special-interest money, both appear to have become aloof from the people they vie to represent.

I'd sure like to ask the two men over to our newspaper office, sit around a table, sip some coffee and hash out the issues. We'd keep it informal and focus the conversation on public issues.

Would they go for it? More important, would the state parties or advisors allow it?

A libertarian?

In his recent newsletter, state Sen. Jason Barickman, R-Bloomington, a rural Streator native, touted a Cato Institute study that showed Illinois posted one of the most dramatic improvements in personal freedoms. It now ranks 20th among 50 states.

That improvement is attributed to new laws for concealed carry, same-sex marriage, legalized medical marijuana and educational choice.

I called Barickman about this study, and he reminded me he was the only Republican senator to support legalizing same-sex marriage.

If you look at his positions on the issues, Barickman is libertarian in his political orientation, meaning he favors more economic and personal freedom.

But that doesn't mean he is supporting Libertarian presidential candidate Gary Johnson. He backs Republican Donald Trump. He said the election is more about the two major parties and the candidates they have to offer.

There's nothing I've seen about Trump that implies he's a small-government conservative, other than his vow to pick conservative judges.

Yet Trump, not Johnson, has attracted most voters who profess to support limited government. That's the curse of the two-party system.