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**Union members heckle Quinn**

By Dave McKinney

Springfield bureau chief

SPRINGFIELD-Union members heckled him while he ate his State Fair favorite for lunch: pork on a stick. A plane flew overhead towing a banner blasting him as anti-worker. A labor leader was stumped on whether he was a better governor than the disgraced Rod Blagojevich.

And to top it all off, Gov. Pat Quinn flubbed a speech with the mother of all gaffes: mistakenly saying the president was dead and confusing him with the terrorist killed by Navy Seals, Osama bin Laden.

It was Governor's Day in name only Wednesday at the Illinois State Fair. But Quinn, enduring one of his toughest and most humiliating days as governor, took it all in stride.

"If you want to be governor of Illinois, and you want to step into the arena, you better have a tough hide," Quinn told reporters.

For decades, whether a Republican or Democrat has occupied the Executive Mansion, Governor's Day at the fair has been designed to be a partisan pep rally typically filled with feel-good fluff.

But this year's Governor's Day got hijacked by a well choreographed, anger-filled labor protest that drowned out anything Quinn could possibly say or do. It was Quinn's one-time friends - the people who got him elected in 2010 - turning on him in grand style.

The venom came from public-employee unions such as AFSCME Council 31, the Illinois Education Association and the Illinois AFL-CIO, among others, all drilling Quinn for wanting to gut public employee pensions, lay off thousands of state workers and close state facilities. "Our members do not have any faith or trust in Gov. Quinn," said Roberta Lynch, deputy director of AFSCME Council 31, state government's largest public-employee union.

"The Pat Quinn who is the governor today is not the governor - not the person - many of us remember and certainly is an extreme disappointment to the members of our union, and I suspect to every state employee," she said.

Asked if Quinn was a bigger disappointment to organized labor than Blagojevich, Lynch replied: "Man, I've asked myself that question many nights. I honestly don't know the answer to that."

Quinn shrugged off the union antipathy, which began with heckling as he entered a Springfield hotel Wednesday morning for a brunch with Democratic county chairmen.

"I have a lot of people who may call me names, but I think there are a lot of people in Illinois who agree with what I'm trying to do, which is to make sure we invest in our children and have good education. And sometimes, you have to make reforms like in the pension area that are difficult but necessary for everyday people," he said.

During a speech to the county chairmen, Quinn tried to rally the party's faithful by talking up the Democratic ticket, touting President Barack Obama as a champion of the middle class and dissing Obama's GOP rival, Mitt Romney, as someone "who doesn't understand what the American economy is all about."

But midway into his speech, he made an embarrassing gaffe, fumbling Obama's name with slain al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden. "Everybody knows Obama's - he's gone. He's dead. And the American auto industry is alive and well thanks to our president," he said, provoking murmurs of "Obama?" from the banquet room filled with more than 1,000 Democrats.

Quinn continued his remarks for a moment longer before realizing his misstep.

"I goofed that one up. Osama bin Laden," the governor said sheepishly, smiling as his cheeks turned bright red. "Osama bin laden is dead, and the American auto industry is alive, thanks to President Obama."

After he arrived at the state fairgrounds, he was followed by an angry mob wherever he went. At lunch, he was heckled while he ate.

During the rally, packed with at least a third of the 3,000 union members who a labor official estimated were at the fair Wednesday, Quinn was booed at every turn.

Known for making long speeches, he spent only two minutes at the podium, talking to sign-waving picketers, his voice virtually inaudible.

"Thank you for that warm, warm welcome," the governor said, sarcasm dripping from his voice. His speech was interrupted by cheers for a union-sponsored plane pulling a banner that read "Gov. Quinn - Unfair to Workers."

His words could be heard only later from broadcast journalists who had recorded the speech from a console wired directly to Quinn's microphone.

During his remarks, he insisted the people of Illinois were "with me" and took it directly to his pension-reform critics, almost waving a figurative middle finger at the union-dominated crowd.

"I inherited a lot of problems that I didn't create, but I'm here to repair and resolve them, reform them. And there may be some people perhaps in this audience even who aren't pleased with some of those decisions, but I want to ask the people of Illinois today: Do you think it's right that in 1992, some state worker who retired on a $60,000 pension - that's 1992 and a $60,000 pension - that 20 years later, under the current pension rules that need to be reformed, that very same person is getting $120,000 from the taxpayers?

"I think most taxpayers and parents in Illinois, particularly those who are concerned about education, want to make sure we invest more money in education of our children and our students in Illinois than we put into the pension piggyback for retired state workers," he said.

Afterward, union leader and lifelong Democrat Ruby Robinson, of Aurora, was furious. "Not one other vote will I cast for a Democrat who is posing as a Democrat but who's actually acting out as a Republican, as a Tea Partier, and that's exactly what Gov. Quinn and his group is doing today," said Robinson, a longtime Department of Employment Security employee and head of an AFSCME local. "They're carrying out the same kind of activities as Gov. [Scott] Walker did in Wisconsin."

After the rally, Quinn left the stage, ducked reporters and strode out a back exit into a waiting motorcade.

One of the few leading Democrats to stick around afterward, state Rep. Lou Lang (D-Skokie), did his best at damage control for the governor, insisting the party thrived on discord.

"This is what the Democratic Party is. It's what it's about. It's what it's always been about," Lang said. "I'm proud of what happened today."