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Rauner challenger Ives says she's 'a little bit surprised' about 'hysteria' around controversial TV ad

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[[Video](#): Illinois State Rep. Jeanne Ives (R-Wheaton) talks to Chicago media on Feb. 5, 2018, following the release of a controversial campaign advertisement.]

Republican state Rep. Jeanne Ives defended a controversial TV ad she's airing in her primary campaign against Gov. Bruce Rauner, saying Monday that its message was "edgy" but that she was "a little bit surprised at some of the hysteria."

The ad is a parody of a spot by Rauner that features Midwest governors thanking Democratic House Speaker Michael Madigan for driving jobs to neighboring states. It features an actor portraying a transgender woman thanking the governor for signing a law expanding trans rights, a woman wearing a pink protest hat thanking the governor for making Illinois families "pay for my abortions" and a hoodie-wearing man with his face covered by a bandana thanking Rauner for making Illinois a "sanctuary state for illegal immigrant criminals."

Speaking at the City Club of Chicago on Monday, Ives said the ad is "generating the expected hysteria from the expected quarters."

"The commercial does not attack people, it tackles issues, I truly believe illustrating the constituencies Rauner has chosen to serve, to the exclusion of others," said Ives, who is a three-term lawmaker from Wheaton.

The City Club is a stop along the way for many candidates for major office in Illinois, its luncheon format offering politicians the chance to introduce themselves and field questions from an engaged audience. Rauner campaign spokesman Will Allison said the ad "has no place in Illinois" and "shows how unelectable" Ives is.

On Monday, it offered a forum for City Club members and reporters to question Ives about the TV commercial that debuted late Friday. It was deemed offensive by groups that advocate for the LGBTQ community, immigrants and abortion rights. It was the abortion issue featured in the ad that helped spark Ives' primary challenge to Rauner.

Asked during a question-and-answer session after her speech about people who criticized the commercial, Ives said she considered the ad to be "edgy" and noted that her positions on the issues discussed in the ad have been well-advertised in her campaign literature and stump speeches.

“I want to know why people are so offended by it. What’s offensive about the ad?” Ives said. “The ad is a policy ad. That’s what it is. It’s an accurate depiction of the policies Rauner put in place.”

[[Video](#): Republican primary challenger Jeanne Ives is mounting an attack on Gov. Bruce Rauner’s conservative credentials, launching a TV ad featuring an actor portraying a transgender woman thanking the governor for signing a law expanding trans bathroom access.]

Ives continued: “That’s exactly — the fat cat Exelon guy, that’s exactly who he bailed out. Hello. The teacher from Chicago Public Schools, that’s whose pension you just bailed out. The transgender man, that’s exactly what typically a transgender man looks like.”

At that point, an audience member shouted out, “no, it’s not,” to which Ives replied, “with all due respect, look, I’ve had him show up at my door.”

Later, Ives told reporters she encountered a transgender lawyer when she was in a court battle involving a death threat she’d received in connection with her position on same-sex marriage legislation that passed the General Assembly in 2013. The lawyer was representing the person who had allegedly made the death threat and showed up at her door, Ives said.

Attendance at the City Club event was more sparse than many political events hosted by the group. Ives delivered a wide-ranging speech that included her biographical background, policy positions and critique of Rauner.

Ives also offered an endorsement of President Donald Trump.

“I am very appreciative to what he’s been doing with the military and restoring confidence in the commander in chief and the generals that he’s put on the battlefield and pushing back ISIS,” Ives said. “I have full confidence in him and I look at the policies beyond the person and that’s what I’ve done down in Springfield as well.”

Asked if her campaign was in communication with Trump for support, Ives replied, “Not that I know of.”

The question-and-answer session was wide-ranging, with one audience member noting that Rauner’s wife is a professed Democrat, and asking Ives where her husband’s political loyalties lie.

“I don’t know if there’s a party called full-blooded redneck,” Ives quipped of her outdoorsman husband.

Over the weekend, Ives reported raking in \$2 million from Lake Forest businessman Richard Uihlein, who had already given \$500,000 to her campaign. The contribution is dated before the purchase of airtime for an autobiographical ad that aired during the Super Bowl halftime

break on Sunday. Uihlein's donations could make it easier for Ives to get her message out in the final weeks of the primary campaign, and media coverage of her controversial ad gets her name in the news, too.

Uihlein, a major conservative donor, most recently helped to bankroll a failed effort to elect Roy Moore to the U.S. Senate in Alabama and previously had been one of Rauner's biggest donors.

Also over the weekend, Ives was called out by a reporter on Twitter for having retweeted a message of support by a person describing themselves as a neo-Nazi. The person had earlier posted messages that were sympathetic to Nazis, including an image of two women holding swastika signs with a caption that read, "Almost everything you think you know about Germany and WW2 came from Hollywood and the Jewish media."

Ives' campaign quickly moved to renounce the person, posting a tweet that said, "We had a staffer re-tweet this message without realizing who this individual was. It has been removed. We repudiate him. Disavow any endorsement and are returning any contribution."

The tweet issue came after several days of controversy surrounding Ives' campaign.

On Thursday, Ives pulled a conservative internet commentator from her lineup at a McHenry County fundraiser after it was revealed that he had said he believes African-Americans are intellectually inferior to whites.

On Friday, Ives' campaign launched the ad she defended Monday. Over the weekend, Illinois Republican Party Chairman Tim Schneider on Saturday called for her "pull down the ad and immediately apologize to the Illinoisians who were negatively portrayed in a cowardly attempt to stoke political division."

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