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**State's new top dog has a watchdog history**

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February 4, 2009

By **David Kolata**

As veterans of many bruising battles with big utility corporations, CUB's consumer advocates are armed with thick skin and healthy skepticism. But these days, we're feeling a bit hopeful. That's because when it comes to keeping utilities in check, Illinois' new top dog historically has been one of its best watchdogs, and that bodes well for Illinois consumers.

Of course, throughout the years, "watchdog" isn't the only thing new Gov. Pat Quinn has been called. There have been plenty of other names, but that comes with the territory when you've spent a lifetime fighting for consumers. In the early 1980s, he led a petition drive to rally support for CUB's creation, and he's known to launch his own Boston Tea Party - like protests by encouraging people to send tea bags to corporate executives who undermine the public interest.

Quinn, like any consumer advocate, has hit the canvas hard, but he always picked himself up, eventually becoming lieutenant governor. Even then, Quinn always had time for CUB, often displaying one of our early membership forms, which asked Illinois consumers, in big red letters: Are you FED UP with soaring utility bills?

"Well, we were back then and we still are," said then-Lt. Gov. Quinn at a recent news conference celebrating CUB's 25th anniversary.

Throughout the years, Quinn and CUB both have ruffled some feathers on behalf of consumers, and a lot of people counted us out. But 25 years later, CUB has saved Illinoisans more than \$10 billion, and Quinn is now the governor.

One of the great tragedies of the Rod Blagojevich scandal during the past few months is that it distracted the Land of Lincoln from the hard work at hand and made it impossible to get anything done. We face a financial crisis with a multibillion-dollar deficit. And we're right in the middle of an unprecedented effort to make our ComEd bills more affordable by revamping our power-pricing system, building a smarter electric grid and making our homes more energy efficient.

It's a big to-do list, and CUB doesn't assume change will come easily or overnight. We do know that after the political turmoil of the past few months it's high time Illinois get back to work.

As we roll up our sleeves, we like the fact that consumers have a person with Quinn's resume sitting in the governor's office ready, willing and able to work with us.

*Citizens Utility Board executive director David Kolata writes a column each month. To reach CUB, call (800) 669-5556 or e-mail info@citizensutilityboard.org.*

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