

10-1-2020

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Recommended Citation

(2020) "All In to Help Illinois," *Conversations*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 15 , Article 7.
Available at: <https://via.library.depaul.edu/conversations/vol1/iss15/7>

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All In to Help Illinois

Alumnus Alex Hanns inspires hope as deputy press secretary for Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker



It has been 80-hour weeks for Alex Hanns (CMN '17) ever since the novel coronavirus began to wreak havoc with our lives. As part of Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker's communications team, Hanns works to encourage Illinoisans to protect themselves and others from COVID-19 as part of the "All In Illinois" public service campaign.

In perhaps the understatement of the year, Hanns says, "It's been a wild ride."

The governor's chief of staff, Anne Caprara, charged Hanns and his colleagues with doing something big. "We launched All In Illinois as a rallying cry aimed at getting people to buy into the idea of doing something for your state and community," says Hanns. "With a country that's so individualistic, you have to approach the response effort in a different way."

"Everyone has a different story and life experience that deserves to be listened to and recognized," he continues. "Everything we do tries to recognize what everyone is going through and that we could celebrate our diversity and still be a unified state."

"We're all in this together" may be the slogan for All In Illinois, but Hanns has long been sold on the concept of the common good. As a high school senior in Norridge, Ill., he "took an AP government class, and it really changed everything. It made me realize that government and politics are where everything we care about intersects."

Hanns started out interning in high school for his community's state senator, and that internship turned into a job and an entry into Chicago politics. He worked on several campaigns, including Susana Mendoza's successful bid for state comptroller, and spent time crafting digital communications for 270 Strategies, a strategy consulting firm.

Most of this activity happened when Hanns was a DePaul student. "You are there to take classes," he says, "but you are also at a campus in the middle of the city, and everyone encourages you to get out there and actually do something."

Hanns entered DePaul as a political science major, but "took some communications and media classes. In government, you need to be a clear communicator. You need to understand what people's needs are and then respond to that, be empathetic and inspire hope. You can't do that without knowing your basics."

After taking a PR-dedicated class, Hanns remembers thinking, "This is it. This is the framework that's going to help me effectively communicate for the rest of my life."

Of his current job, he says, "It's been an incredible experience—challenging but uplifting at the same time. You just need to know how to adapt and move forward with whatever life throws at you."