

Survival odds now tilt against Madigan

Springfield insiders say the beleaguered speaker—facing allegations the governor calls "unspeakably wrong"—now has an uphill battle to retain his post as head of the Illinois House. Here are the latest signs of his unraveling fortunes.



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Illinois Springfield/Flickr Michael Madigan in 2012

It's not over until it's over, not when the wiliest of political survivors ever is involved. But odds that Mike Madigan will be re-elected speaker of the Illinois House in January now appear well below 50-50 after [the latest indictments in the Commonwealth Edison bribery scandal](#).

"I don't see the path to getting the 60 votes he'll need for the speaker any more," said state Rep. Will Guzzardi, D-Chicago, a trusted labor ally in Springfield, but one who this morning urged Madigan to go voluntarily and

said he would vote against Madigan if the speaker tries to stay.

Fifteen members of Madigan's Democratic caucus now have publicly called on Madigan to retire, two more than are needed to keep him from a majority. "It's very unlikely any of those people are going to walk it back," said Guzzardi, adding that "three or four" other colleagues have told him privately that cannot vote for Madigan.

"It's hard to envision him being speaker again," one longtime Madigan House loyalist told me, asking not to be named. The strong-minded speaker "is going to take his time" and let political reality sink in, that source added, but he'll go—"at his own pace."

Madigan's support has been slowly slipping in the months since ComEd signed a deferred prosecution agreement in which it conceded it funneled jobs, contracts, financial payments and more to Madigan associates to "reward" him for advancing its Springfield agenda.

Madigan has not been charged with anything by federal prosecutors and has consistently denied any misconduct. [Only today he released a statement](#) emphasizing that he has not been charged and saying "there is nothing wrong or illegal about making job recommendations, regardless of what people inside ComEd may have hoped to achieve from hiring some of the people who were recommended."

[But legal and political realities are different.](#) Republicans with some success made Madigan a big issue in unseating Illinois Supreme Court Justice Thomas Kilbride and defeating Gov. J.B. Pritzker's prized graduated income tax amendment in this month's election. Then the new charges hit last night, with the feds indicting longtime Madigan associate and confidant Mike McClain, a former House majority leader turned ComEd lobbyist.

"Given the new indictments, I and some of my colleagues felt this was the time to speak," said Guzzardi. The election results "tell the story that the people of his state have lost their faith in our current leadership."

Guzzardi's defection, joined today by Reps. Jonathan Carroll of Northbrook and Sam Yingling of Round Lake, was particularly notable because of Guzzardi's extremely close relationship with the Chicago Teachers Union, which has been working hard behind the scenes to save Madigan's job.

Guzzardi told me not to "read too much" into his decision, which he said he reached without consulting the CTU. But for what it's worth, the CTU hasn't responded to requests for comments. The Chicago Federation of Labor did, issuing a simple statement of confidence in the speaker and little else, but they're almost certainly going to have to say more in days ahead. Meanwhile, neither Mayor Lori Lightfoot nor Pritzker said anything—yet.

I'd expect them to speak up, sooner rather than later. At the moment, Madigan's ship is sinking, and it's increasingly doubtful that will change. His potential loss of the speakership, of course, will set off an all-out succession battle. But more on that later.

3 P.M. UPDATE: Madigan needs to either publicly answer questions at length about his conduct or resign, Gov. J.B. Pritzker said today.

The governor, referring to allegations in the federal indictment as "unspeakably wrong," sharply ramped up criticism of the speaker, saying the time has come for Madigan to do more than issue statements denying any misconduct.

"If Speaker Madigan wants to continue in a position of enormous public trust with such a serious ethical cloud hanging over his head, then he has to, at the very least, be willing to stand in front of the press and the people (and) answer every last question to their satisfaction," Pritzker said in comments at his daily COVID-19 briefing. "Written statements and dodged investigatory hearings are not going to cut it."

"If the speaker cannot commit to that level of transparency, then the time has come for him to resign as speaker," he continued, effectively repeating the same language in answer to a question a moment later.