

More House Democrats drop support for Madigan, putting his decades-long hold on speaker's post in peril

By [Jamie Munks](#) and [Dan Petrella](#) -- Chicago Tribune | -- Nov 19, 2020 at 10:33 AM

Illinois House Speaker Michael Madigan, the longest-serving House speaker in U.S. history, is also the state's Democratic Party chairman. (E. Jason Wambsgans / Chicago Tribune)

Three more Illinois House Democrats announced Thursday they won't support Michael Madigan for another term as speaker, putting the powerful politician's continued leadership on even shakier ground a day after one of his closest political confidants was charged in a bribery scheme.

"This year has presented us with many challenges and we have always put the betterment of the people of Illinois first. We want

to see our caucus go a new direction with different leadership. Therefore we will not be supporting the current speaker for the 102nd General Assembly," state Reps. Sam Yingling of Grayslake and Jonathan Carroll of Northbrook said in a joint statement issued Thursday morning.

Rep. Will Guzzardi, of Chicago, said Thursday he will also not support Madigan for another term as speaker.

"The charges announced last night only confirm what we already knew: the old ways of doing business in Springfield will not be adequate to rise to our present challenges," Guzzardi said in a statement. "We will need new, transformative leadership to meet this moment."

The defections come a day after Michael McClain, 73, a lobbyist and one of Madigan's closest political allies, was charged with bribery conspiracy and bribery in a 50-page indictment returned by a federal grand jury.

Also charged were former Commonwealth Edison CEO Anne Pramaggiore, 62, of Barrington; lobbyist and former ComEd executive John Hooker, 71, of Chicago; and Jay Doherty, 67, a consultant and former head of the City Club of Chicago.

Federal prosecutors allege those four individuals orchestrated a bribery scheme that allegedly provided Madigan allies with money and jobs in exchange for help with legislation favorable to the ComEd.

The three House Democrats making statements Thursday morning join eight of their colleagues who have previously said they wouldn't support Madigan for another term as speaker. Madigan needs 60 votes to hold on to the speakership.

The difficulty facing Madigan became more clear this week when it became public that four legislators from the city and suburbs sent the speaker a private letter telling him they believe it is time for him to step aside. The four lawmakers had not previously said they would withhold support for Madigan

Reps. Deb Conroy of Villa Park, Robyn Gabel of Evanston, Anna Moeller of Elgin and Ann Williams of Chicago, declined to comment on the letter but issued a statement saying they would "continue to work internally within the House Democratic caucus to determine the future of our leadership while working to restore public trust."

"Ensuring that the voters have confidence in their elected leaders at all levels of government is of the utmost importance to us," the lawmakers said.



House Democrats appear poised to have at least 72 members once the Nov. 3 election results are certified. If those four lawmakers join the 11 colleagues who have publicly dropped their support for Madigan — a number that includes the three legislators who made their announcements Thursday — it would be enough to deny him another term as speaker.

Madigan gave no sign he intended to step down in a lengthy statement issued Thursday. He continued to deny wrongdoing and said the investigation has been used as a “political weapon by those who seek to have me step down.”

“After a lengthy investigation, the U.S. attorney’s office has charged, but of course has not proven, that certain ComEd employees, consultants, and lobbyists allegedly conspired with one another in the hope of somehow influencing me in my official capacity,” Madigan said. “Let me be clear: if that attempt ever happened, it was never made known to me. If it had been known to me, it would have been profoundly unwelcome.”

He continued: “If there was credible evidence that I had engaged in criminal misconduct, which I most certainly did not, I would be charged with a crime. But I have not, and with good reason because 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.”

The House Democrats who have defected from Madigan haven’t coalesced around a potential replacement.

So far, only state Rep. Stephanie Kifowit, a four-term Democrat from Oswego, has announced as a candidate to lead the chamber. Some House Democrats have indicated Kifowit lacks support, and that if it becomes clear Madigan won’t serve another term as speaker a number of lawmakers may launch bids to succeed him.

One name that comes up repeatedly in conversation with House Democrats as a potential successor to Madigan is Rep. Kelly Burke of Evergreen Park, whose district stretches from the Southwest Side into the southwest suburbs.

Burke, an assistant majority leader, wouldn’t say last week whether she’d back Madigan for another term. “I’m going to kind of keep my powder dry,” she said.

As for speculation about her as a potential replacement, “that’s the parlor game,” Burke said.

“People just talk,” she said.

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