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## Fwd: Dems should thank Madigan - and thank Republicans

1 message

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July Board Meeting

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From: **State School News Service** <j.m.broadway74@gmail.com>  
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## Dems should thank Madigan - *and thank Republicans*

By Jim Broadway, Publisher, Illinois School News Service

Most of today's missive is about Illinois House Speaker Michael Madigan. Why? Because he is unique among politicians in Illinois, even among politicians in the nation. He has, to a large extent, shaped to topography of our state's policy and political environment. His work has affected everyone, including you, significantly. (BTW, there have been no changes in the status of [the 68 bills that we're tracking](#).)

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House Speaker Michael Madigan has had a lot on his plate for many years. Making sure the House functions as it should is no easy task. There are many moving parts, and some of them move unpredictably. His other job - guiding Democrats to victory in elections at all levels in Illinois - is related, but even more complex.

Madigan makes it look easier than it is. Democrats cannot be herded from here to there with just a few clucks from their caucus leaders. Madigan has achieved amazing results, in policy outputs and in election victories, but often he has done so in spite of the independent streaks that infect so many in his party.

Fortunately for Madigan, Republicans *seem to support his efforts reflexively*. He holds great power, for example, controls the flow of all bills and all amendments in the House. To halt a bill, he just tells his Rules Committee hold it, not assign it to a "substantive" committee for debate and a vote. That blocks it?

Well, there's one way out. A legislator can "move" to have a bill or amendment "discharged from Rules." How many votes does that motion need? A majority? A three-

fifths majority? No, and no. It takes "*unanimous* consent." But Madigan did not write that rule. *Republicans wrote it* last time they ran the House (1995-97).

**Madigan's dictatorial power to control** the House policy process is far from his only gift from Republicans. They stayed in step so tight with former Gov. Bruce Rauner that they share the shame of his one-term status. Rauner's ineptitude hurt the GOP as much as Rod Blagojevich's arrogant political [sociopathy](#) hurt the Democrats.

And the GOP takes positions that make you dizzy. They provided nearly all the opposition to [HB 1438](#) (legalizing, taxing and regulating cannabis) in spite of polls showing public support - and in spite of research showing that white people, too, smoke pot. (But they did vote for spending the money marijuana may generate.)

Gov. JB Pritzker's [graduated tax proposal](#) lowers income taxes, just a tad, for 97% of income taxpayers, and nudges taxes up a point or two for the top 3% of Illinoisans, the wealthiest among us. This is [not a guess; it is fact](#). That idea polled well too, but [not one Republican](#) would support *just letting the 2020 voters* decide.

These are just examples. There have been many (e.g., budget gap) in which Republican legislators would stand in debate, mouthing arguments even they cannot be so ill-informed as to believe, trying to stoke fear and discontent and cynicism, but doing it poorly. But, again, these are *not their biggest gifts to Madigan*.

**There's a blog that was written in 2006** by a *prominent Republican attorney*. [It is at this link](#). It's about Michael Tristano, also a prominent Republican, going to prison. Tristano was chief of staff for ex-Illinois state Rep. Lee Daniels (R-Elmhurst, the last Republican to hold the office of Speaker of the House, 1995-1997).

Tristano got in trouble for dispatching House GOP staffers to the election campaigns of House Republican candidates, and then documenting their work *as if they were on state business* - paying for their political work with state dollars. The crime was shocking. (Daniels wasn't even indicted, however. Clean hands?)

At the same time, House Democratic staffers *also did political work*, helping House Democratic candidates. But they *had taken "voluntarily" unpaid leave*, so there was no such violation of law. Subsequently, those Democratic staffers got some nice "bonuses" for previous "excellent" work during the session. Hmmm.

The point is this. GOP staff and Democratic staff did the same things - worked at the Capitol during the legislative session and then out on the campaigns - and their state-paid compensation was probably similar. But laws were broken to pay the GOP staff (looked bad) while the Democratic staff's pay was "legal" (looked good).

**Any other GOP gifts to Madigan?** Caucus leaders now recruit candidates and control campaigns. Madigan's work has been more focused, more intense, more impersonally dedicated to success than that any of the Republican leaders who have tried, and failed, to out-manuever him in his many election years.

It's not just that he's smarter than Daniels, or Tom Cross, or Jim Durkin (although likely he is). The difference is like that between chess and checkers. Madigan's politics is chess with intensity. His GOP counterparts could probably play chess if they wanted to, but their political game is checkers. They lack his focus.

Madigan and his staff leaders are obsessive. They know all about the competitive districts, their demographic and voting trends. They know all about the potential candidates - the Democrat's *and* the Republican's. The entire state is their chess board and they don't see elections as a "local" function.

They - not local organizations - pick the candidates. They - not the candidates - decide what the issues are and how they will be framed; and who will be tapped to provide endorsements; and what political charges will be alleged against the GOP opponents. They, not the candidates, will generate most of the money.

Don't the Republican caucus leaders do the same? Of course, but not with the same intensity. Their egos are often in the way. The effects show up in the performance

assessments of newly arriving legislators. Democrats seem to have a grip on the policy process the day they arrive. I don't want to name names, but many of the Republicans need a map to find the rest rooms; they file dumb bills and express dumb ideas - on the record. The GOP needs better recruitment practices.

**The Madigan Way of creating candidacies** is actually more efficient than democracy. His staff members get the right men and women, match them with the right opponents, at the right time, with the right talking points in support of the right issues. And in even-numbered years the Democratic caucuses just grow.

Is this just a paean to Madigan? Not at all. Personally, I prefer democracy. And I've called on Madigan to retire twice. He enabled Blagojevich far too long. He *had to know* the man was unbalanced. He has signed off on decades' worth of severe pension system under-funding. He *had to know* that chicken would come home.

No, this is just a civics lesson about how the process works in Illinois, especially in the House. As a journalist for a major metro newspaper, I interviewed Madigan when he first became Speaker in 1983 - and I've watched him closely ever since. He's a national figure, the longest-serving Speaker of any state in U.S. history.

How does he do it? That's beyond the scope. He is a case study. But a key, I believe, is his detachment. His job, as he seems to see it, is to keep a Democratic majority. His views on policy issues are rarely expressed. Mostly, he seems to have none. He rarely gathers the media, and speaks carefully when he does.

He avoids crowds, doesn't even attend his own fund-raisers; he and wife Shirley just greet his arriving supporters and then leave. His outward persona is courteous, humble even. His ego very rarely shows. The ego difference between him and Daniels is easily seen in the Illinois Blue Book [descriptions of their speakerships](#).

Rauner tried to [characterize Madigan as a crook](#). A primary candidate who opposed Madigan has filed a suit, forcing him to be [deposed for the first time](#). Efforts are under way to find Michael Madigan in violation of some law. While he may do things that *should be* against the law, I think he would never do anything that *is*.

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**How did you celebrate July 4?** Me, I studied one of the founders of our country, George Washington. Not *all* about him, just mainly about his teeth. They tormented him as a young soldier, as the general in charge of the revolution and as the president of the United States. They [affected his depiction in paintings](#).

The author's professorship is in dentistry. He truly made me feel Washington's pain. He had all the information about the materials used in making Washington's dentures. Spoiler alert: no wood. Hippo ivory, actual human teeth (likely from slaves) and brass nails. Washington was great despite his suffering.

[Tempering patriotism with humility](#) was another July 4 author's theme. She celebrated Mount Rushmore, but noted as well that it was sculpted from hills and rocks that are sacred to - and [never willingly relinquished](#) by - Lakota Peoples.

It took 150 years for the Chinese laborers - openly discriminated against, vilified and a great many sacrificed in the work to unite the nation by railroad - to be given [the recognition they are due](#).

Yes, the article seeks an honest telling of the story of national monuments. The 10 sites where 110,000 Americans of Japanese descent were incarcerated during WW II cannot be interpreted with undiminished pride, for example.

For me, the most memorable historical moment related to July 4 occurred actually on July 5, of 1852, when Frederick Douglass sadly told his New York friends what [meaning a celebration of freedom](#) could hold for slaves.

Douglass spoke a bit of Washington who, he said, "could not die till he had broken the chains of his slaves." As the dentist reported, the Father of Our Country still owned 317

slaves on the day he died. A ledger he left behind reflected a payment of 6 pounds, 2 shillings "to Negros for 9 Teeth" to be delivered to his dentist.

**I turned 76 on Saturday, same age as Joe Biden.** Would you vote for me to be president? Didn't think so. My vote would go to **Elizabeth Warren**. She's edging up on 70, but her energy level makes her seem much younger. Most importantly, her issue positions are clear. She "has a plan" - and we sure do need one of those.

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