



Lisa Madigan won't run for Senate, governor; will try to stay AG

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Refusing to take what many considered to be an open shot at governor or U.S. Senate, Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan shook the political landscape Wednesday in announcing she wants to stay in her current position instead.

The fallout from a move seemingly few political observers expected stretches from next year's election to this week's negotiations over tax hikes.

Already on Wednesday, U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk of Highland Park started signaling his intent to run for U.S. Senate - a post President Barack Obama had talked to Madigan about

running for.

And Republicans breathed a sigh of relief.

"This is a huge plus," said former Gov. Jim Edgar. "She is their strongest candidate by far."

State Sen. Kirk Dillard, who announced his run for governor on Wednesday, agreed.

"I believe my chances are much better at Pat Quinn or someone else than Lisa Madigan," Dillard said of the current governor, who took over after the ouster of Rod Blagojevich.

For months, potential candidates on both sides of the aisle have been weighing their decisions against whether Madigan was going to make a bid.

"Think of a bathtub filled with water with no place to go," said Paul Green, political professor at Roosevelt University. "Lisa Madigan just pulled the plug."

"Now it is open for everybody," he said. "Lisa changes everything."

The daughter of powerful House Speaker Michael Madigan has used her two terms in office to leverage goodwill with residents as she laid out an agenda focusing on consumer protection, ethics advocacy and help for senior citizens. She won her last election with 72 percent of the vote and had more than \$3.5 million in her campaign fund at the start of the year.

For her part, Madigan said Wednesday at an overflowing Chicago news conference that her decision was based on professional and personal considerations.

The 42-year-old said she was still "passionate" about being attorney general and also was concerned about the time a bigger campaign and position would take away from her husband and two young children, Rebecca, 4, and Lucy, 1.

"This is a decision that I made with my husband about what is best for us and our family, and what is best for the state," she said.

The primary and general election are in 2010. Petitions to get on the ballot will start circulating next month.

Madigan would not rule out a run for higher office in the future, saying, "There's always a chance that I'll do something different in four years."

Madigan's move has repercussions beyond just the ballot box.

Quinn, who rose to the spot from lieutenant governor after Blagojevich's ouster, has had trouble marshaling support from lawmakers as he pushes an income tax hike and struggles with service cuts facing a \$9 billion budget shortfall.

Lawmakers who have long expected Madigan to successfully challenge Quinn in a primary had little reason to listen to him.

"Certainly the idea that Lisa Madigan was going to be there to take him out made it easier for lawmakers to take Quinn on," said Kent Redfield, interim director of the Institute for Legislative Studies at the University of Illinois in Springfield. "If they now come to the conclusion that they are stuck with Quinn, that may change the calculations."

But Quinn is "not out of the woods yet," Redfield notes.

Illinois Comptroller Dan Hynes is still a potential primary challenger and he has been critical of Quinn's budget handling. State Reps. Jack Franks of Marengo and Lou Lang of Skokie have also floated bids.

Hynes issued a statement Wednesday saying he supported Madigan's decision to try to stay on as attorney general and was still contemplating his next move.

Meanwhile, Madigan's potential bid for governor had also cast a cloud over budget negotiations as her father butted heads with Quinn across the negotiating table.

Michael Madigan has recently faced an increasing pace of questions regarding the influence of his daughter's political aspirations on his actions.

"I'm not going to go there," he recently said when peppered with such questions.

Conventional wisdom at the Capitol was that Mike Madigan was motivated to do whatever was needed to resolve state budget problems so that his daughter would not inherit a financial mess if she became governor.

On the Senate side, Obama political strategists tried to recruit Madigan to run for the president's old seat, now held by Blagojevich-appointed Roland Burris.

Madigan had originally been most interested in running for governor, but it appeared recently that she was entertaining the prospect of a Senate bid.

Republicans are eyeing the seat as they hope to cut back the Democrat's 60-vote supermajority.

Madigan's exit now leaves the Democratic primary more open, says Dick Simpson, head of the political science department at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Potential contenders include Illinois Treasurer Alexi Giannoulias and Merchandise Mart boss Chris Kennedy.

"The best option for the party would have been for her to run for U.S. Senate and make sure the 60 Senate seats were kept," Simpson said.

Madigan's decision is good news for Republicans, said Illinois House GOP leader Tom Cross of Oswego.

"This certainly changes the political climate," he said. "And it certainly changes the political landscape."

- Daily Herald State Government Editor John Patterson contributed to this report.

Out: Decision could change budget negotiations