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Illinois recount wouldn't start for a month

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SPRINGFIELD, Ill. — If Illinois decides on doing its first ever statewide election recount, the process won't begin for at least a month.

No recount can be started until the election results — including early and absentee ballots — are finalized March 5.

Losing candidates can file a request for a statewide ballot recount with the Illinois Supreme Court for 15 days after the election results are finalized. Candidates within 5 percent of the winner also can petition individual counties to recount ballots at 25 percent of the area's precincts after March 1.

The Supreme Court would decide whether a full recount is warranted. If it orders such a recount, the court appoints a judge in each circuit to coordinate how to proceed. That judge determines whether the state board will play some role.

Because it hasn't happened before, making any guesses at a step-by-step process is "speculation," said Rupert Borgsmiller, Illinois State Board of Elections assistant executive director.

Election law allows circuit judges to assign authority for recounting to the State Board of Elections, a possibility that Borgsmiller said the agency will spend the next month preparing for.

If the candidate can convince the Supreme Court there was a mistake or fraud worthy of a statewide recount, he or she could be on the hook for up to \$75,000 to cover the costs. The initial filing also comes with a fee of \$10,000.

The monetary cost of a recount shouldn't mean much to candidates who have raised and spent far more during their primary campaigns.

But the political price of a fierce intraparty battle could be enough to give

candidates pause, said Ron Michaelson, former director of the state board of election and a political science professor at the University of Illinois-Springfield.

"I know we have nine months before the general election, so there is ample time to proceed and still make the kind of unification necessary," Michaelson said. "But there's always the risk of deeper wounds and creating alienation that's hard to repair."

By Wednesday afternoon, with nearly all votes counted in informal results, state Comptroller Dan Hynes lagged behind Gov. Pat Quinn by about 7,000 votes out of about 900,000 cast for the Democratic Party's gubernatorial nomination. Three Republican candidates also were bunched together near the top of the GOP ballot, all within 1 percentage point.

The last time a candidate asked for a statewide recount was in 1982, when Democrat Adlai Stevenson challenged Republican Jim Thompson's gubernatorial victory. The state's Supreme Court found that a law to allow it didn't even exist yet.

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