

The New York Times® Reprints

PRINTER-FRIENDLY FORMAT  
SPONSORED BY

This copy is for your personal, noncommercial use only. You can order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers [here](#) or use the "Reprints" tool that appears next to any article. Visit [www.nytreprints.com](http://www.nytreprints.com) for samples and additional information. [Order a reprint of this article now.](#)

CAREY  
MULLIGAN

September 7, 2010

# Chicago's 'Mayor for Life' Decides Not to Run

By **SUSAN SAULNY**

CHICAGO — Mayor **Richard M. Daley** dropped the bomb at a routine news conference at City Hall on Tuesday. With no prelude or fanfare, Mr. Daley announced that he would not seek re-election when his term expires next year.

“Simply put, it’s time,” he said. “Time for me. And time for Chicago to move on.” Later, he continued: “I’ve done my best. Now, I’m ready with my family to begin the next phase of our lives.”

The shock waves spread across the city — which years ago nicknamed Mr. Daley, a Democrat, Mayor for Life — and all the way to Washington, where the White House chief of staff, **Rahm Emanuel**, said earlier this year that he would like the job.

On Tuesday, Mr. Emanuel issued a statement honoring the mayor’s service. He did not say whether he intended to run. (The filing deadline for the Feb. 22 election is Nov. 30.)

For the better part of 56 years — for better and for worse — the Mayors Daley will have run Chicago: first, Richard J. Daley, the current mayor’s father, from 1955 to 1976, when he died in office, then Richard M. Daley, from 1989 to 2011. The day after Christmas, he will become the longest-serving mayor in the history of the city, surpassing his father.

Historians may see that as a theme. The younger Daley, 68, inherited a city riven by racial strife and mired in official corruption. Even if he failed to eliminate those ills, some would say, he turned the city into an economic success story, paying particular attention to beautifying Chicago’s aging core.

The younger Mr. Daley promoted the city's business, tourism, culinary and art industries in a way that positioned Chicago to compete with American cities better known for such things, like New York and San Francisco.

"If you look at other major industrial cities in the Midwest, Chicago has really reinvented itself over and over again, said Cindi Canary, director of the Illinois Campaign for Political Reform. "It is a beautiful, world-class city, which is not to say it doesn't suffer from great inequities and crime, or that the Daley administration hasn't been touched by corruption. But on balance, we have been a city that has been able to thrive. There has been an urban renaissance here, and Mayor Daley played a very big role in that."

He also tore down some of what his father built, sometimes literally. For instance, the first Mayor Daley built the high-rise public housing projects that became a model for the rest of the country. The second Mayor Daley began tearing down some of the largest projects — considering them a failed experiment in public housing — and many cities followed his example, too.

Despite both mayors' administrations being plagued by corruption, both are also credited with preventing Chicago from experiencing the ignominious slide that other Midwestern cities had, like Cleveland, Detroit or St. Louis. Coming out of the midcentury, Chicago was known mostly as hog butcher to the world.

Over the decades, the Daleys (and the fewer than a half-dozen intervening mayors) diversified the city, keeping it growing as comparable Rust Belt cities shrank. The elder Daley built O'Hare International Airport, securing Chicago's place as a national transportation hub in the modern era, as it had been in the age of railroads. The younger Daley expanded O'Hare, a mission that continues to this day.

"The Daley legacy is political continuity, economic development and revitalization," said Kent Redfield, a political scientist from the University of Illinois, Springfield. "Having stability and continuity in local government has been a big plus in terms of developments, and there's been a strong relationship with big business and big labor. It was certainly also a hallmark of the first Daley administration, being able to bring economic interests together."

Last fall, Mr. Daley suffered what was perhaps his most significant recent defeat not in an

election but when Chicago lost its bid to host the 2016 Olympic Summer Games. He emerged globally as the city's promoter in chief and suffered a blow when Chicago was among the first cities eliminated.

Here in Chicago, the news of Mr. Daley's imminent departure was greeted with near universal shock. "Oh, my God! We know we knew it would happen someday, but I certainly didn't wake up thinking it would be today," Ms. Canary said. "It's very exciting and a little scary."

Professor Redfield added, "It is remarkable when you see people walk away from power."

Perhaps the very definition of a strong mayor with almost absolute command, Mr. Daley leaves no apparent political heirs. He was widely expected to seek a seventh term without serious opposition. Few have been willing to challenge him. But now that he is stepping down, some political experts expect to see a flood of contenders.

In the recent past, several potentially strong candidates have said they would be interested in running for mayor should Mr. Daley decide not to. "One day I would like to run for mayor of the City of Chicago," Mr. Emanuel, a former mayoral campaign aide, said during an April interview on "The Charlie Rose Show."

Thomas J. Dart, the Cook County sheriff, is also a possible candidate.

Representative [Jesse L. Jackson Jr.](#), who serves the South Side of Chicago and its suburbs, is known to have his eye on the post-Daley era of city politics, though Mr. Jackson has remained largely quiet since becoming entangled in the corruption trial of former Gov. [Rod R. Blagojevich](#).

Mr. Jackson did issue a statement on Tuesday. He said Mr. Daley was leaving the city in poor fiscal shape. "Regarding potential successors, I expect there will be numerous candidates, but only a few can mount a serious bid for mayor," Mr. Jackson said, not noting whether he would. Other possible contenders have said they were biding their time.

"I can't remember the last time we had a truly open seat like this," said State Representative John Fritchey, a Democrat who said he was considering whether to run. "Right now, not knowing who's running, it's difficult to make the determination."

Mr. Daley said at his news conference that although the news media and others might seek some hidden reason for his decision, there was none. "In the end, this is a personal decision," he said. "No more, no less."

Chicagoans in political circles said they believed him.

Mr. Daley's wife, Maggie, has been suffering from breast cancer since 2002. She is a well-known and respected figure here, having done much to help beautify the city.

"In the end, family trumped politics, and we shouldn't be surprised, because that's who he is," said Andy Shaw, executive director of the Better Government Association, a local watchdog group.

"I think he visualized a tough re-election campaign interrupted frequently and unexpectedly by new complications in his wife's cancer fight, and that's a scenario he wanted to avoid," he added.