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## Control of Illinois House, Senate at stake

By Ray Long, Tribune reporter

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Democrat Michael Madigan on Tuesday will try to extend his long run as Illinois House speaker, hoping that the widespread expectation of Republican momentum in this year's election doesn't turn into a sequel to 1994.

That's the year the Southwest Side chieftain tumbled from power, the only blemish since he first seized control 28 years ago, an exile that lasted but two years.

Nobody expected the 1994 GOP surge to overwhelm Madigan, and it's hard to find many who expect him to lose his majority Tuesday. But House Republicans say they have their greatest chance in years to cut into Madigan's ability to block or pass legislation at will. Their hopes are buoyed by voter resentment over how Democrats are running government in Illinois and Washington and a voter rage that intensifies when the economy sputters.

Madigan holds a 70-48 Democratic edge. To take over the House, Minority Leader Tom Cross, of Oswego, needs a net gain of 12 seats. That would get Republicans to the 60 votes required to run the show. Cross said he's "cautiously optimistic."

House Majority Leader Barbara Flynn Currie, D- Chicago, called it "unbelievable" that Republicans are using Madigan's long tenure as a campaign wedge issue.

"My sense is that it's inside baseball," Currie said. "For most people, it's not relevant."

The price tag of this exercise in democracy is setting records. Fourteen individual Senate and House races are each expected to top \$1 million in spending, according to David Morrison, deputy director of the Illinois Campaign for Political Reform. Many of the hotly contested races are sprinkled throughout the suburbs.

Madigan and Cross, joined by Democratic Senate President John Cullerton and Senate Republican leader Christine Radogno, are dumping scads of cash into the most competitive races, hoping to tip the scales their way.

It's also expected the record for spending on a single legislative seat will fall, with the tab for one downstate Senate race projected to surpass \$2.4 million, said Kent Redfield, a longtime campaign

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finance expert based at the University of Illinois at Springfield.

Madigan spokesman Steve Brown suggested the dire predictions that this election will result in the political demise of many Democrats are off the mark. Brown said many races will come down to Election Day turnout, something Democrats take pride in doing well.

"I think it's all going to come down to who has the boots on the ground on Tuesday," Brown said.

Cullerton is not expected to be in danger of losing the Senate, given his 37-22 advantage. But he could lose enough seats to dip below a veto-proof majority of 36 senators.

Stakes this year are high because the crew elected Tuesday will attempt to redraw the boundaries of legislative districts, a once-a-decade partisan melee that would be easily avoided if Democrats retained the governorship and control of the General Assembly.

If the House Republicans could pick up as many as eight — viewed by some insiders as the high end of potential GOP gains — they would make it tougher for Democrats to pass whatever they want with votes to spare. It would be harder for Madigan to protect vulnerable lawmakers from taking controversial votes.

Eager to be relevant once again, Illinois Republicans seek a comeback. They watched their candidates weighed down by the corruption scandal that put ex-Republican Gov. George Ryan in prison. They muttered as they got held back by the hope-inspired 2008 campaign rush that pushed Barack Obama, a Democratic favorite son of Illinois, into the White House.

Since then, Democratic Gov. Rod Blagojevich was arrested, impeached and ousted, the tea party movement picked up steam and the state's finances sank deeper into disrepair. Illinois Republicans are hoping to capitalize in the midterm elections like they did 16 years ago when they swept control of state government.

What's different from 1994 is that Madigan, rarely one to overlook a history lesson, learned in defeat that he must hold ground in key races just in case there is a catastrophic national Democratic wipeout. Madigan also has an advantage this time because he lost power under a 1990s legislative map in which district boundaries were drawn to help Republicans. Today's map is drawn by Democrats to help Democrats.

And straight-party voting doesn't exist like it did back then, meaning voters can't punch their ballot once in anger and be done with it.

Though Democrats beg to differ, Cross maintained he is playing defense in only one House race — the seat vacated by veteran Rep. Beth Coulson, R-Glenview, who lost a congressional primary.

The race to replace Coulson is one of the seven million-dollar House contests. Republican Hamilton Chang, of Wilmette, is running against Evanston Democrat Daniel Biss, who has a 2-1 money-raising edge but previously lost to Coulson.

Two other high-dollar House races are unfolding in the northwest suburbs. One is for the seat being abandoned by Republican-turned-Democrat Paul Froehlich, of Schaumburg. The combatants are Democrat Michelle Mussman, a community volunteer and self-described "Mom on a Mission," and Republican lawyer Ryan Higgins. The other pits freshman Rep. Mark Walker, D- Arlington Heights, against former state Rep. David Harris, an Arlington Heights Republican who has served as adjutant

general in the Illinois National Guard.

Five of the million-dollar Senate races are in the Chicago area. Headlining the list is a particularly competitive contest on the Northwest Side: Ald. Brian Doherty, the City Council's lone Republican, is taking on appointed Democratic Sen. John Mulroe, who replaced retired Sen. James DeLeo.

In the south suburbs, Sen. Toi Hutchinson, D-Olympia Fields, is trying to fend off a challenge from Republican Adam Baumgartner, of Monee. And Sen. A.J. Wilhemi, D-Joliet, is battling Cedra Crenshaw, a Bolingbrook Republican who gained national attention as an African-American mother with tea party support. Democrats lead in fundraising in each of these races.

Up north, former Republican Sen. Steve Rauschenberger is trying to retake his old seat, which is occupied by Democratic incumbent Mike Noland in a district centered in Elgin.

And freshman Sen. Mike Bond, D- Grayslake, is taking on Republican Suzi Schmidt, the Lake County Board chairwoman from Lake Villa.

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