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Daley departure good for Downstate

By Jim Nowlan

In the Spring of 1969, I sat on the House floor as a freshman member of the General Assembly. We were to vote on a new income tax for the state. Voting switches opened and 60-70 Republican Aye votes, including mine, went on the electronic voting billboard for all to see. This was way short of the 89 needed for passage.

But all was not lost for those who felt the tax necessary. The Democratic House minority leader began to speak at length about the value of the tax, which would benefit not only the state but also the City of Chicago and other municipalities.

Mayor Richard J. Daley wanted this to pass. As the minority leader, a Daley man, continued his speech, he waved his hand, as a signal, and five Democratic Aye votes popped up on the electronic board. Then another signal, and another five Aye votes went on the board, as if orchestrated Arturo Toscanini.

These were Chicago votes controlled by Mayor Daley I, and they kept coming on until the magic 89<sup>th</sup> vote was reached. Daley controlled his delegation in the legislature with an iron hand. They needed him for jobs and advancement (many worked for the city while also serving in the legislature); they did as they were told.

I thought of that exercise in power when Daley's son, the present mayor of Chicago, announced his impending retirement. Richard M. Daley never took the reins of the Democratic Party, as his father had. The power of the party was waning anyway, as patronage jobs were being limited by the courts.

Instead, Daley II has exercised power through the money generated as contributions in return for major building and service contracts awarded to business, and by his appointment power to fill vacancies on the city council, and by his ability to get things done in the city wards, or not, for his aldermen.

Daley II has had just about as much power as his father, gathered over 20-plus years as mayor. Aldermen and Chicago state legislators need the mayor from time to time; rarely does the mayor need them.

I have only met the mayor a couple of times. He struck me as very street savvy and mercurial of temperament, which he apparently is. The mayor has made the city a more inviting, exciting place and a city of important global rank. Millennium Park is probably his signature aesthetic achievement but there are others notable, such as O'Hare expansion and development of Navy Pier and McCormick Place.

In his wake, Downstate should benefit a little, because the power of the city will be fragmented for up to a decade, maybe longer. Multiple black, Latino and white-ethnic groups will try to exert their authority in politics. Whoever is elected mayor will need the aldermen and community leaders more than they will need him, certainly at first.

This means when the mayor speaks in Springfield, through his lobbyists, there will be less robust support immediately from Chicago lawmakers. And the new mayor will be preoccupied with managing the city and its major financial problems, so less attention will be paid to Springfield.

Several months ago, I explained in this space that I believe the mayor's staff was able to convince legislative leaders to enact two changes in the school funding formula, which benefited Chicago greatly at the expense of Downstate. Those sophisticated

manipulations of policy in Springfield are much less likely to occur under Daley's successor, at least not until power has been re-concentrated in the mayor's office.

From now until November 22, when petitions must be filed, a long list of prospective candidates will be strutting their stuff, trying to prove they have more money, credibility and/or visibility than the others, hoping to scare certain candidates out of making the race. If 6 to 10 candidates file for office, then the two primary nominees might need only 20-30 percent of the vote each to win the primary and go on to the runoff election.

No matter how it plays out, the fragmenting of power in Chicago is probably good for Downstate, if maybe not for the city.