



M U L T I S T A T E

[House Speaker Michael Madigan says it's not 'ethically improper' to find government jobs for people. Here's what he's failing to mention.](#)

For years, Illinois House Speaker Michael Madigan has defended his aggressive push to land political allies and their friends and family on taxpayer-funded payrolls, but rarely has he waxed as philosophically about it as he did last week in a three-page letter.

Facing intense pressure from a federal investigation into ComEd's bribes-for-favors scandal and [an invitation from a House corruption committee](#) to tell the public what he knows, Madigan's missive broke two months of near silence. The powerful speaker loudly proclaimed his innocence and tried to reframe his penchant for patronage hiring as a virtue.

Not only is "helping people find jobs not a crime," Madigan wrote, it's not even "ethically improper" for politicians to make job recommendations.

"To the contrary, I believe that it is part of my duties as a community and political leader to help good people find work — from potential executives to college interns, and more," wrote the 78-year-old Illinois Democratic Party chairman, alluding to some of the very jobs that prosecutors brought up in charging ComEd with crimes. "What an employer chooses to do with that recommendation rests solely with their discretion."

What Madigan didn't mention when discussing the numerous jobs he's secured for people during more than 50 years in politics is how that practice has benefited him and what it's cost taxpayers and electricity ratepayers.

The Tribune has [spent the last decade](#) chronicling how it works: Patronage jobs are the lifeblood of Madigan's political organization. And the people Madigan recommends be hired often serve as foot soldiers on the campaigns for the very legislative seats that allow the speaker to stay in power. In turn, that control of the House is key to helping Madigan bring in clients at his law firm, which handles high-dollar property tax appeals on some of Chicago's biggest buildings.

Starting in 2010, [the Tribune published](#) the “The Madigan Rules,” a first-of-its-kind, yearslong investigation that exposed how the speaker built his political empire and law practice, revealing how those two careers repeatedly intersected. The report found that in some cases Madigan took public actions that benefited his private clients, though the speaker said his “personal code of conduct” ensured he maintained “high ethical standards.”

In 2013, the legislature’s watchdog [investigated Madigan’s role](#) in a Metra scandal after the commuter rail agency’s then-executive director [contended he was muscled out](#) for not acceding to the speaker’s patronage demands.

More recently, Madigan even answered questions about patronage under oath in what he said was [his first-ever deposition](#). During testimony as part of a lawsuit, Madigan made clear he knows the finer points of his vaunted patronage army.

Beyond that, the current ComEd probe has put under the spotlight another practice that’s gone on at the Capitol under Madigan: the cycle of House Democratic staffers and friendly lawmakers [who leave and then land](#) a hefty stable of lobbying clients in part based on their perceived access to the speaker. Those lobbyists often become part of a campaign fundraising network that provides money to help Madigan-backed candidates.

Though they’re not drawing a government salary, those lobbyists also contribute to the policies enacted in Springfield that affect the pockets of taxpayers.

The speaker has not been charged in the ComEd case. He has denied wrongdoing.

“As I have said before, I have done nothing wrong,” Madigan wrote in his letter, which explained [why he would not appear](#) before the House panel looking at the ComEd scandal. “I believe that (the federal) investigation, once all of the facts are made available to the public, will demonstrate that I have not engaged in any improper conduct.”

Speaker’s playbook

While the ComEd investigation represents the gravest threat Madigan has faced to his reign, it’s not the first time his government and political operation has come under public scrutiny.

In its [investigative series](#), the Tribune reported that public records showed Madigan’s law firm in 2008 represented 45 of the 150 most valuable downtown buildings – more than twice what the closest rival represented. Some clients said it’s not that simple to separate the expert tax assistance the firm provides from the political reputation of the man whose name is on the door.

At that time, Madigan ally Joe Berrios sat in judgment over property tax appeals that Madigan's firm filed. Berrios doubled as a state lobbyist, plying his trade inside a Capitol where Madigan held sway. In 2010, Madigan helped Berrios get elected county assessor, giving him power over how all property is valued for property tax purposes. Madigan's firm [did well on appeals when Berrios](#) was assessor.

The Tribune also found Madigan took public actions that benefited his private clients. As a public official, he got a private road behind a shopping mall repaved, helped secure state funding for an expanded tollway interchange and intervened for a developer looking for state cash. In each case, Madigan was a private lawyer for businesspeople who stood to benefit.

Madigan said there were no conflicts of interest in the Tribune's findings, which he described as "strained attempts to link my legislative actions to clients of the firm who might remotely and incidentally 'benefit' from such action."

In 2012, [the Tribune reported](#) on how a large operator of assisted living homes signed on with Madigan's law firm and found itself with several Springfield wins. Nursing homes, pharmacies and other assisted living companies in recent years all have hired the property tax law firm where Madigan is the rainmaker-in-chief. As speaker, Madigan made decisions affecting the fortunes of many companies that put money in his pocket, the Tribune found.

Madigan said he abides by a written personal code of conduct to avoid conflicts on matters involving clients.

In addition, [the Tribune in 2014](#) documented more than 400 current or retired state and local government employees who worked elections for Madigan, donated regularly to his campaign funds, registered voters for him or circulated candidate petitions on his behalf. The investigation also found repeated instances in which Madigan took personal action to get them jobs, promotions or raises. From the ranks of those workers, Madigan built the most potent ground game in Illinois politics, which he has used to influence elections in every corner of the state, especially state House races.

One of those political workers, Raymond Nice, had a six-figure job at the Cook County recorder of deeds office and later briefly was appointed to a county employee panel. More recently, prosecutors alleged that Nice was designated a subcontractor and had payments funneled to him through a ComEd lobbyist. Nice did little or no work, prosecutors said.

Metra scandal

That look at Madigan's patronage army was spurred by a scandal at Metra over whether the speaker went a step too far in trying to exert his clout as he navigated the intersection of public business and ward-style patronage through his Chicago office and Illinois Capitol suite.

Metra CEO Alex Clifford contended his tenure was shortened because he didn't bow to Madigan's patronage demands. According to Clifford, the speaker wanted Metra to give a raise to a 13th Ward acolyte who was a labor relations specialist and secure a job for another person who was not identified.

Clifford refused. In the end, he walked away with a severance package worth up to \$871,000 — a controversy that ended up with public hearings.

"I thought it was an ethical and moral character flaw," Clifford testified about Madigan's actions.

A secret 2014 watchdog report [obtained by the Tribune](#) concluded that "insufficient evidence" existed to say Madigan violated the state ethics act or other related laws in the Metra scandal.

But Thomas Homer, the legislative inspector general at the time, issued a statement noting that "a decision to close an investigation based on insufficient evidence does not constitute a Good Housekeeping seal of approval or a best practices award."

Madigan, who requested the Metra investigation at the height of the scandal, was quoted in the report as speaking highly of one operative the speaker backed for a promotion.

"You can understand that there are many people that are involved with me and campaigns and community service. Among these many people, some are better than others. (He) happens to be one of those who is better than others," the speaker is said to have told Homer.

The report also highlighted how Metra's then-board chair once entered Madigan's Capitol office to talk about government issues and left with a yellow Post-it note bearing the names of two workers the speaker wanted to see promoted — moves the board chair later told the Tribune she didn't make.

And the report outlined how Clifford recalled a similar meeting in which a then-Metra lobbyist with strong Madigan ties was spotted carrying two resumes out of Madigan's office.

In his report, Homer wrote that the proximity of Madigan's discussions first about government issues and then shifting to his favored employees "created the impression among Metra officials that the speaker's support for Metra's legislative initiatives may be linked."

"While this may not have been the speaker's intention," Homer wrote, "the natural inferences to be drawn by Metra officials should have been obvious."

ComEd probe

Long ago, Madigan learned the ways of Chicago-style patronage under his mentor the late Mayor Richard J. Daley. Since then, Madigan has made so many inroads that at least one pocket of government has earned a nickname in his honor.

At the city's Streets and Sanitation Department's bureau of electricity, Madigan enjoyed such success in placing people that the agency became known as "Madigan Electric."

That nickname has taken on a different context as the speaker has been linked to the ComEd scandal.

ComEd has admitted in federal court that it sought to influence legislation in Springfield by arranging for jobs and vendor subcontracts for Madigan's political allies, approved lobbyists and ward operatives even in instances where they performed little or no work.

For instance, ComEd allegedly agreed in May 2018 to pay \$5,000 a month to retiring 23rd Ward Ald. Mike Zalewski, an ally from Madigan's Southwest Side sphere of political influence, as part of a "roster" of Madigan associates.

Former Ald. Frank Olivo, who represented Madigan's 13th Ward power base for years, is among those identified as getting a ComEd subcontract.

Victor Reyes, the speaker's onetime ally, a former political operative for Mayor Richard M. Daley and founder of the now-defunct patronage army the Hispanic Democratic Organization, is in a law firm identified as receiving ComEd legal contracts. The deal was set to shrink, but Reyes talked to a Madigan ally to try to save it from the chopping block, according to federal court records and testimony from a ComEd official.

One 2019 meeting involving ComEd officials described matter-of-factly how Madigan had named people for decades to hold lower-ranking power company jobs, such as meter readers —

what one speaker ally called part of an “old-fashioned patronage system,” according to federal authorities.

As part of an agreement with prosecutors, ComEd [is paying a \\$200 million fine](#), the largest ever at Chicago’s federal courthouse. In exchange, federal authorities will drop a charge of bribery against ComEd after three years if the power company cooperates.

The federal filings on ComEd also include allegations of Madigan clout involving an individual who was well-versed in the speaker’s ways.

Juan Ochoa, the former head of the Metropolitan Pier and Exposition Authority, [told the Tribune](#) for a 2014 story that Madigan called him to request a raise for the daughter of a former state senator who once represented Madigan’s Southwest Side neighborhood. Ochoa said the daughter was a hard worker who deserved a raise, and she got it after Madigan’s call.

“I didn’t feel like he was putting a gun to me but, then again, he is the speaker of the House,” Ochoa explained at the time. “This was someone who is important to the speaker of the House, who to a great extent controlled our legislation and funding.”

These days, federal prosecutors have alleged that in 2017, Madigan sought to appoint Ochoa to ComEd’s board of directors.

The request was made by longtime ComEd lobbyist and Madigan confidant Michael McClain to then-ComEd CEO Anne Pramaggiore, prosecutors said.

Pramaggiore received internal company resistance and asked McClain if Madigan would be satisfied if she secured a \$78,000 part-time job for Ochoa rather than the board seat, but McClain said the speaker would appreciate if she’d “keep pressing,” according to court documents.

Around September 2018, having been elevated to an executive post with Exelon, Pramaggiore allegedly reassured McClain: “You take good care of me and so does our friend (meaning Madigan), and I will do the best that I can to, to take care of you.”

Ochoa was appointed in April 2019, but he is no longer on ComEd’s board.

Madigan’s ties to the ComEd scandal were on display on two fronts this week.

In Chicago, former ComEd executive Fidel Marquez, who oversaw lobbying efforts, [pleaded guilty](#) to bribery conspiracy for participating in a long-running jobs scheme designed to influence Madigan's legislative decisions.

In Springfield, Democrats and Republicans in the House debated whether the speaker conducted himself in a manner unbecoming of a lawmaker. The proceedings were part of an evenly split Special Investigative Committee, one that the nation's longest-serving legislative leader dismisses as a Republican "stunt" to get free media coverage before the November election.

Democrats [rejected](#) Republican attempts to subpoena Madigan, Marquez and a lineup of the speaker's associates who allegedly benefited from jobs and contracts.

Madigan's letter to the committee loomed large at a hearing, where House Republican leader Jim Durkin maintained Democrats would have to disregard ComEd's admissions to believe the speaker "didn't know what was going on around him."

In his letter, though, Madigan maintained that ComEd's agreement with federal prosecutors "does not attribute any misconduct to me. It asserts that certain individuals at ComEd hired individuals I purportedly recommended in an attempt to influence me. But let me be clear: that attempt was never made known to me — if it had been, it would have been profoundly unwelcome."

Under oath

What does Madigan look for when he makes a job recommendation?

A Madigan deposition [the Tribune first disclosed last year](#) gave a few clues. He acknowledged giving recommendations on behalf of a number of members of his 13th Ward organization for government jobs, ranging from the offices of Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White to Cook County's circuit court clerk.

Madigan knew the whereabouts of his troops so well that when he was asked about a policy analyst at City Hall, the speaker recalled that person, a member of his ward organization, had switched over to a job at a different government agency.

"I recommended him to the (Chicago Housing Authority)," Madigan testified.

And he was hired, an attorney asked? "He was hired."

Madigan also had a recommendation to replace the retiring Zalewski in the neighboring 23rd Ward seat when the alderman left the City Council: state Rep. Silvana Tabares.

Who did you talk to, the speaker was asked?

“Rahm Emanuel,” Madigan said.

The then-mayor appointed Tabares to the seat.

At another point, Madigan was pressed on whether it is his standard practice to recommend precinct captains for positions in various levels of government.

“You can understand that many people come to me asking for recommendations for employment, and I render recommendations for employment in both the private and the public sector. I do it in both. But there’s a test that people have to meet,” he replied.

“They have to be, to my knowledge, they have to be honest, hardworking people with integrity. And if they are, I’ll recommend to a potential employer the best of my knowledge and my experience with this person, this would be a good worker for your office, a good worker for your business whatever it may be.”

[Democratic challenger questions SC Rep. Finlay’s contract with Santee Cooper bidder](#)

Democrat [Rhodes Bailey](#), a Columbia attorney who’s challenging Republican state Rep. Kirkman Finlay for State House in November, says his opponent’s business deal with a company interested in buying Santee Cooper — South Carolina’s debt-ridden public utility — raises ethical questions.

The assertion is part of a new \$80,000 [TV ad buy](#) from Bailey, who is challenging Finlay for the northeast Columbia district, which includes parts of Forest Acres, Fort Jackson and Garners Ferry Road. The ad will start airing Saturday in Columbia.

In the ad, shared with The State, the narrator’s voice says that “Kirkman Finlay is putting himself first at the State House,” including that Finlay was paid by a “Florida company lobbying the Legislature.”

In response, Finlay called Bailey's logic "flawed," saying it shows that his opponent is "desperate."

Finlay, through his Frank Hampton Farm LLC, entered into a three-year option agreement with Florida-based energy giant NextEra on Oct. 9, 2017, to lease out his property off White House Road in Richland County for a solar farm. The contract gives NextEra the option to lease the property for 30 years.

Finlay says he's been paid about \$14,000 to \$15,000 a year from NextEra for the company to have the option to lease his property, but that NextEra has not built a solar farm yet. The contract between the LLC and NextEra expires this month, but Finlay said there is an option to renew it.

The agreement was signed about two months after state-owned Santee Cooper and the now-defunct Cayce-based SCANA abandoned a plan to build [two nuclear reactors in Fairfield County](#), saddling ratepayers with billions of dollars in debt and setting off a debate about whether the state should sell Santee Cooper. [Gov. Henry McMaster expressed support for exploring a sale](#) early on.

NextEra made moves in the state, registering lobbyists to represent the company in November 2017. The company wasn't alone. By early 2018, [several companies with interest in the future of Santee Cooper had teams of lobbyists](#), and by February 2019, [four serious bidders reportedly had interest in buying](#) the utility.

In May 2019, legislators passed and the governor signed a law directing the Department of Administration to work with a third-party consultant to take and [evaluate competitive bids for buying or managing the utility](#). The law also told the DOA to evaluate whether the utility should remain state-owned. Earlier this year, DOA reported that [NextEra had emerged as the winning bid](#) for buying Santee Cooper outright.

Senators rejected the sale option, opting for reforms instead. But the [House Ways and Means Committee](#), which Finlay serves on, chose two paths forward: to push NextEra for a better deal and keep open the option of reforming the state-owned utility.

Finlay was among 19 budget members to vote yes.

Bailey, who works at the Richland County Public Defender's Office but says he took leave after Labor Day until the campaign is over, says his opponent's relationship with the power company is problematic.

“Kirkman Finlay’s financial ties to NextEra and this undisclosed conflict of interest are hazardous to South Carolina and compromise any potential sale of Santee Cooper,” Bailey told The State. “Whether or not you’re in favor of a sale, you can’t trust him to get 100% on the dollar from NextEra if he’s in their pocket at the same time.”

But Finlay told The State he sees no conflict of interest in the agreement he entered, referring The State to his [state ethics disclosures](#). In those ethics disclosures, called [statements of economic interest](#), candidates and elected officials list details about their income, both private and public, and identify potential conflicts of interest.

His 2019 and 2020 disclosures say he owns land “with (an) interest value of \$100,000” (the threshold for reporting), and that he has leased — or has granted options to lease — land to private solar companies.

Neither of the disclosures mention NextEra specifically. His 2018 disclosure does not mention solar at all.

Finlay told The State he’s entered into eight or 10 options with companies over the last several years and, like many rural and big land owners across the state, is regularly approached.

“I’m sure NextEra was running around everywhere,” he said. “They’ve got hundreds of agreements around as the state as I understand.”

Asked Friday to elaborate on the option agreement, Debbie Larsson, a spokesperson for NextEra, said, “We have nothing to offer.”

Headquartered in Florida, NextEra bills itself as “the [world’s largest utility company](#)” and a world leader in wind and solar energy generation. The company’s pitch for buying Santee Cooper included an aggressive expansion of solar power in its portfolio.

The company does not have any holdings in South Carolina, but it is not unusual for power companies to get options on land for expanding solar power.

The option contract between NextEra and Finlay’s LLC says nothing about the purchase of Santee Cooper.

Finlay says the fact that he supported making NextEra come back with a better deal is proof he's looking out for power customers and not the company.

“Isn't that the discharge of my duty? The argument is by making them pay more, I'm helping them?” Finlay said. “My opponent's logic is flawed. What we are doing is attempting to get the best price and deal for the ratepayer.”

Finlay also said his option contract with NextEra has had “zero” impact on his decision-making as a lawmaker, adding that in 2018 he recused himself from a vote on a large solar bill because of his option contract with the utility.

Finlay has also been critical of Santee Cooper's board and management. In an [April op-ed on the political website FITSNews](#), Finlay wrote, “All options should be on the table for Santee Cooper: sale, partial sale, reform, or all of the above.”

But that perspective is far from unique in the Legislature, where many lawmakers are critics of the utility.

Finlay said Bailey's argument “shows he is desperate.”

“I would think that he would be in favor of renewable resources, and I would think he would be in favor of local generation of power,” Finlay said. “Do I think this is politics at its worst? Yes. This is taking energy policy and trying to make an issue out of it.”

Bailey disagrees.

“I don't think this disclosure is going to change Kirkman's mind, because he doesn't see any problem with it,” Bailey said. “If he did, he wouldn't have done it in the first place. It is shocking that he would not recognize that there's a clear conflict of interest here.”

[Amid accusations of insider politics, Parson campaign rents space from lobbyists](#)

At the same time Republican Gov. Mike Parson's campaign is criticizing his opponent's husband for having served as a lobbyist, the governor's team is sharing office space with lobbyists.

The campaign is paying \$1,000 a month for space in the Missouri Chamber of Commerce and Industry's headquarters in Jefferson City, as well as using space in a suite of offices owned by lobbyist Brent Hemphill, who represents Ameren, AT&T and a number of casinos.

The chamber is among the more high-powered lobbying groups under the Capitol Dome, pressing for pro-business issues including pandemic liability protections for businesses.

Parson campaign manager Steele Shippy said Hemphill has contributed the space in his building as an in-kind donation. The offices used by the campaign are on a different floor from Hemphill's lobbying organization, he added.

Shippy contends the chamber building is owned by a not-for-profit entity, meaning the campaign is not renting directly from the chamber.

And, he said the campaign is paying market prices for both spaces.

"Our campaign follows the rules and guidelines for our office space," Shippy said.

A spokesman for Democratic state Auditor Nicole Galloway said the arrangement shows how Parson's "powerful friends" are spending money to keep him in power.

"The hypocrisy would be stunning if it weren't already commonplace in Jefferson City," Eric Slusher said.

Since the advent of the campaign, [Parson allies have attempted to define Galloway as an insider](#), even though she's been in state government for far less time than Parson.

She was appointed auditor in 2015 and won a full term in 2018.

Parson, a former Polk County sheriff, served 16 years in the Legislature and two years as lieutenant governor before ascending to the governor's office in 2018.

A political action committee allied with the Republican governor, for example, has run ads accusing Galloway of ethics violations in connection with her husband, Jon Galloway, who was a registered lobbyist for the Mortgage Research Center, also known as Veterans United Home Loans, from September 2013 to March 2015.

Soon after they began airing, Galloway's campaign fired off cease-and-desist letters to television stations saying the 30-second spot was false, leading to nine broadcasters removing the original ad from the airwaves.

Shippy also has tweeted a graphic labeling Galloway's father, husband and uncle as lobbyists. Her father-in-law, Doug Galloway, has lobbied for the telecommunications provider CenturyLink.

But Parson also has long been friends with one of the Statehouse's most powerful and controversial lobbyists, Steve Tilley, a former House speaker who has raised money on behalf of the governor's bid for a full, four-year term.

The Kansas City Star [earlier reported](#) that Tilley has has been under FBI scrutiny for months — with questions ranging from his involvement in the medical marijuana industry to his connections to utility contracts in Independence.