State Editor

June 10, 2024
The Illinois Answers Project seeks a State Investigations Editor who will oversee projects with state-wide focus.

The Illinois Answers Project is a nonprofit investigative news outlet published by the Better Government Association. As a member of our Pulitzer Prize-winning newsroom, you’ll shape the strategic vision for state coverage and edit investigative journalists diving into topics within Illinois Answers four key topic areas: criminal justice, government accountability, equity and economic opportunity and education.

The ideal editor for this role will have some data analysis skills, strong news judgment and experience leading a team through high-impact investigations and enterprise. Your team will include three state investigative journalists and two others focused on other coverage areas.

We want someone who can work with media partners and manage all aspects of the statewide program, including its budget and tracking story impact. This is a senior position in the newsroom that works directly with other editors to carry out our strategic vision. The position reports to the Editor-in-Chief.

**Minimum qualifications:**

- At least 5 years of journalism experience editing investigations or substantial enterprise.
- A proven ability to generate investigative and enterprise stories that drive change.
- Experience editing reporters of various skills sets.
- Excellent planning, organizational and time management skills
- Strong interpersonal skills
- A bachelor’s degree in journalism or related field or equivalent combination of education and experience.

**Preferred qualifications:**
A strong background in Illinois issues and news
- Experience editing Solutions Journalism stories or projects or an openness to learn.
- Interest in audience strategy

**Location:** Illinois Answers is a hybrid newsroom (two to three in-office days per week) based in downtown Chicago.

**Compensation and Benefits:**

The salary range for this position is $120,000 to $125,000, contingent on experience and other job-related factors. The position includes medical and dental insurance; vision and transit benefits; a comprehensive paid time off package; and a 401(k) with an employer match.

*We are looking for a talented, high-potential colleague who can contribute to the success of this enterprise. So please apply even if you don’t meet all the listed job requirements.*

*We also encourage applicants from traditionally underrepresented communities, including people of color, LGBTQ+ people and people with disabilities. The Better Government Association is an equal opportunity employer. We’re committed to cultivating and preserving a culture of inclusion and connectedness for all employees. We welcome the unique contributions you can bring in terms of education, opinions, culture, ethnicity, race, sex, gender identity and expression, nation of origin, age, languages spoken, veteran status, color, religion, disability, sexual orientation and beliefs.*

**How to Apply**

Apply via [our application form](#). Select “State Editor” from the drop-down menu.

**About Illinois Answers:** The Illinois Answers Project is an investigations and solutions-focused nonprofit and nonpartisan newsroom published by the Better Government Association, [*winner of the 2022 Pulitzer Prize in local reporting*](#). The Illinois Answers Project seeks to inform, engage and mobilize residents, civic leaders and public officials to generate and implement changes that build a state of Illinois in which all communities can prosper. The Better Government Association also publishes [BGA Policy](#), which advocates for more transparent,
accountable and equitable government through public policy reform. The newsroom staff and BGA Policy staff operate independently.

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Investigative Reporter

June 10, 2024

About the organization

The Illinois Answers Project is an investigations and solutions-focused nonprofit and nonpartisan newsroom published by the Better Government Association, winner of the 2022 Pulitzer Prize in local reporting. The Illinois Answers Project seeks to inform, engage and mobilize residents, civic leaders and public officials to generate and implement changes that build a state of Illinois in which all communities can prosper. The Better Government Association also publishes BGA Policy, which advocates for more transparent, accountable and equitable government through public policy reform. The newsroom staff and BGA Policy staff operate independently.

About the role

The Illinois Answers Project, a nonprofit award-winning news organization published by the Better Government Association, is seeking an investigative reporter with data skills.

Illinois Answers has four concentrated areas of coverage, including stories on equity and economic opportunity. The ideal candidate will show a track record of generating original, deeply reported stories in that area.

The candidate also will know Illinois public records laws and how to use FOIA requests to create data sets, and can assist other reporters with data brainstorming and analysis.

We are looking for a collaborative, enterprising journalist who wants to combine these data and technical skills with investigative and solutions storytelling.
Reporting to: Steve Warmbir, investigations editor

As a reporter for Illinois Answers, a successful candidate will:

- Pitch and execute original story ideas that fall within our key topic areas, with a focus on equity and economic opportunity.
- Be comfortable juggling multiple short, medium and long-term investigative and solutions stories both independently and as part of a team.
- Establish sources by spending time in Chicago neighborhoods across the city, with an emphasis on the South and West sides, which have traditionally been undercovered by local media.
- Have experience with or an openness to Solutions Journalism.
- Be a self-starter with excellent time-management and organizational skills.
- Have a collaborative mindset and an eagerness to partner both internally and externally.
- Have a strong grasp of key issues affecting communities across Illinois.

Candidate requirements:

- 7 years of reporting experience with demonstrated impact
- Bachelor’s degree in journalism or other relevant discipline
- Data literacy and experience with Excel and/or Google Sheets
- Familiarity with Illinois public records laws
- Experience with version control or collaborating on data projects
- Familiarity or interest in SQL, R and/or Python
- Experience with making data more accessible for readers with graphics or interactives
- Applicants must be eligible to work in the United States

Location:

Illinois Answers is a hybrid newsroom (two to three in-office days per week) based in downtown Chicago.
Compensation and Benefits:
The salary range for this position is $85,000 to $95,000, contingent on experience and other job-related factors. The position includes medical and dental insurance; vision and transit benefits; a comprehensive paid time off package; and a 401(k) with an employer match. This position is represented by SAG-AFTRA.

How to Apply

Apply via our application form. Select “Investigative Reporter” from the drop-down menu.

We are looking for a talented, high-potential colleague who can contribute to the success of this enterprise. So please apply even if you don’t meet all the listed job requirements.

We also encourage applicants from traditionally underrepresented communities, including people of color, LGBTQ+ people and people with disabilities. The Better Government Association is an equal opportunity employer. We’re committed to cultivating and preserving a culture of inclusion and connectedness for all employees. We welcome the unique contributions you can bring in terms of education, opinions, culture, ethnicity, race, sex, gender identity and expression, nation of origin, age, languages spoken, veteran status, color, religion, disability, sexual orientation and beliefs.

Prospect Development and Systems Manager

June 10, 2024
Founded in 1923, the Better Government Association is a nonpartisan, nonprofit news organization and civic advocate working for transparency, equity and accountability in government across Chicago and Illinois.

With philanthropic contributions accounting for nearly 100% of the budget,
partners and supporters ensure the full scope of the BGA’s multifaceted strategy, which encompasses Pulitzer-Prize-winning investigative and solutions-focused reporting, incisive and potent policy reform initiatives and civic engagement work ranging from the halls of power and corporate towers to overlooked and disinvested communities across Chicago and Illinois.

About the Role

The Prospect Development and Systems Manager, a new role, will be an integral development team member, providing a dynamic opportunity to help guide and facilitate development and portfolio systems while serving as the primary manager of the BGA’s WealthEngine and RelSci platforms and donor database, Raiser’s Edge.

We seek an exceedingly meticulous, self-starter who can define this role at a time of growth and innovation for the organization—in a competitive environment in both our news and policy realms. This valued colleague will work closely with the vice president of development, senior manager of major and individual giving, senior manager of institutional giving, and events Manager while sometimes coordinating with the CEO and executive assistant.

This role has two core tenets of responsibility:

1. As the primary manager of Raiser’s Edge daily operations and functionality, they will prioritize data integrity and help inform efficient data-informed fundraising strategies. They will implement and functionalize our systems, mailed appeals and the department’s broader stewardship and engagement plans to support the BGA’s 2024 fundraising goals and tactics.

2. Focusing on the BGA’s prospect pipeline development and new portfolio system, they will supercharge philanthropic outreach by identifying and tiering WealthEngine and RelSci data lists, appropriately folding in, and tracking board member contacts for optimal portfolio moves management.

Prospect Development and Portfolio System Management
• Collaborate closely with the Development team to align portfolio program operations with overall fundraising objectives. Co-lead bi-monthly portfolio meetings, tracking needed moves and activities across budget line prospects and supporters up for renewal.
• Lead the strategic implementation and optimization of WealthEngine and RelSci’s comprehensive wealth and philanthropic screening data and relationship mapping.
• Analyse WealthEngine data to provide actionable insights and recommendations for fundraising plans.
• Leverage data insights to identify, prioritize, and segment potential donors and institutional partners to properly populate the development team’s portfolios, ensuring alignment with organizational goals.
• Generate comprehensive reports and analysis of portfolio performance, larger fundraising and engagement plans, and wealth screening outcomes. KPIs could include donor acquisition and renewal rates, ROI analysis of appeal and engagement activities, qualification indicators and outreach (typically four points of contact per new prospect), etc.
• Provide in-depth prospect research as needed.

**Raiser’s Edge & Systems Administration**

• Manage daily Raiser’s Edge data entry and operations, including instituting and upholding ongoing thorough measures that ensure its integrity, accuracy, and donor information security.
  • Responsible for gift entry and processing, working with the BGA finance team and external accounting firm to manage, process, and accurately record all donations of checks, credit cards, stock, and electronic funds transfers.
  • Responsible for drafting, preparing, and sending acknowledgment letters weekly, emphasizing timeliness, accuracy, and record-keeping.
  • Provide weekly reports and track fundraising progress towards fiscal year goals and Board impact (give/get). Respond quickly and accurately to data retrieval requests such as mailing lists, event RSVPs, and proposal status queries.
- Manage the Raiser’s Edge (RE) database by assessing existing procedures, implementing optimal business solutions to maximize its potential, and integrating best data practices and action tracking to meet future reporting and analysis requirements.
  - Partner with the senior manager of major and individual giving to manage all large-scale appeals and department engagement mailings, from timelines to building segmented lists, project pricing, and final fulfillment with printer and mail house.
  - Create and manage segmented lists and reporting of critical engagement touchpoints (e.g., gift receipts, phone call logs, thank you notes, etc.), appeals, and other tactical requests.
  - Systemize collecting and updating actions, notes, proposals, and constituent information.

- Support development events by standardizing events to database integration, ensuring data collection, relationship tracking, and reporting.

- Support the development team with various administrative duties, including answering the phone, scheduling meetings, communicating with donor offices, and preparing weekly donor reports.
- Other duties as assigned.

**Qualifications**

While preference will be given to candidates who meet all listed qualifications, we encourage applicants who possess a strong combination of relevant skills and experience to apply. We value diverse perspectives and recognize the potential for individuals to contribute significantly to our team.

- Passion for fundraising and the BGA’s mission. A commitment to valuing diversity and a desire to contribute to an inclusive and teamwork-oriented working environment is required.
- Three to five years of experience in prospect pipeline development and portfolio systems with in-depth knowledge of screening methodologies and relationship mapping.

- Working knowledge of philanthropic capacity platforms, i.e. Wealth Engine. Knowledge of or interest in Asana or other cross-functional project management platforms.

- Three years + experience working with Raiser’s Edge or comparable database experience, including queries, exports, imports, reports, and data analysis. Working knowledge of Microsoft Office Suite, OLX, and Google is essential.

- Strong orientation to customer service; utmost discretion in handling confidential data. Dependability, accuracy, an aptitude for planning, and attention to detail are required.

- Able to work in a high-energy environment, meet deadlines, multi-task, and provide effective follow-up with staff and external partners.

- Excellent written and oral communication skills with a demonstrated independent work ethic.

- Ability to occasionally work evenings or weekends to attend cultivation events as needed.

**Compensation and Benefits**

This role is a full-time position with a salary range of $70,000. Benefits include health and dental insurance, vision benefits, a comprehensive paid time off package, a commuter spending plan, 401K retirement plan, remote work opportunities, and more.
Work Location

BGA staff work remotely two to three days a week and from the office the remainder of the time. Each employee receives a BGA laptop and a $50 monthly stipend toward cell phone expenses.

Commitment to Diversity, Equity, Access, and Inclusion

The BGA is committed to providing a diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplace where all employees, regardless of gender, race, religion, ethnicity, national origin, age, sexual orientation or identity, education, or disability, feel valued and respected. We are committed to a nondiscriminatory approach and provide equal employment and advancement opportunities in our departments, programs, and policies. We’re committed to cultivating and upholding a culture of inclusion and connectedness for all employees. We respect and value diverse life experiences and heritages and actively work to ensure that all voices are valued and heard.

How to Apply

Please email your cover letter or writing sample and resume to jobs@bettergov.org. The subject line should read Prospect Development and Systems Manager: [Your Name].

We will begin reviewing submissions immediately and consider applicants while the posting remains on our website. Candidates selected for an interview will be notified via email. Please note that incomplete submissions will not be considered. We look forward to reviewing your materials. Thank you!

Join us for Beyond the Byline and the Driehaus Foundation Awards
Illinois Answers Reporters Join Prestigious Investigations Fellowship

June 10, 2024
Illinois Answers reporters Sidnee King and Cam Rodriguez will take part in the New York Times Local Investigations Fellowship this year.

BGA Names Ruby L. Bailey Editor of Illinois Answers Project

June 10, 2024
Ruby L. Bailey, a seasoned newsroom leader with a deep appreciation of the power of journalism to prompt positive change, is joining the Better Government Association’s Illinois Answers Project as editor-in-chief.

Bailey joins Illinois Answers from USA Today, where she served as consumer editor. Prior to that, she was opinion and public engagement editor at the Indianapolis Star, and she previously served as executive editor of The Missourian, in Columbia Missouri.

At USA Today, Bailey led projects that focused on the impact of the Fair Housing Act on Black homeownership and diversity in the C-suite of corporations after the murder of George Floyd. At the Indianapolis Star, she reported and wrote columns that gave voice to people often overlooked by the power structure of the city. Bailey also has advocated for the power of solutions-focused journalism, following intensive solutions training undertaken in 2019.

“Ruby is a natural leader with a proven track record of enabling journalists to do their very best work. She connects actively with communities she covers so their voices are heard. Ruby has led incisive reporting projects and her outwardly focused mindset will help connect us to our journalism and community partners,” said David Greising, president of the BGA. “Under Ruby’s leadership, the BGA’s
Illinois Answers Project will produce journalism that exposes wrongs, finds solutions, and has a positive impact on the people of Illinois.”

“My life’s work and mission is empowering communities through journalism,” said Bailey. “I can think of no better place than the Illinois Answers Project to lead a group of journalists committed to that important work for the people of Chicago and Illinois. Together, we will delve deeply into the most pressing problems and give residents the information they need and deserve to effect the change in our communities.”

A journalism graduate from Wayne State University, with a masters in theology from Biola University, Bailey got her start in professional journalism in Flint, Michigan before returning to her native Detroit. At the Detroit Free Press, she produced award-winning coverage about tensions between Muslim and Black residents after the shooting of a Black man at a gas station. Bailey later served as Washington Bureau correspondent for the Free Press and was embedded with the U.S. Navy during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Bailey serves on the boards of the Midwest Center for Investigative Reporting and the Missouri Press Foundation. She will begin her leadership for the Illinois Answers Project newsroom on Jan. 2, 2024.

The BGA, which is celebrating the 100th year of its founding, in 2022 began publishing the Illinois Answers Project, an investigative and solutions-focused website focused on public safety and accountability; education; equity and economic opportunity, and government finance and accountability. The BGA in late 2021 received a commitment of up to $10 million from the Robert R. McCormick Foundation, to make possible a major investment in solutions reporting and civic outreach that enhances the impact of Illinois Answers Project journalism.

In 2022, the BGA was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Local Reporting for its coverage, with the Chicago Tribune, of failures in fire safety by the City of Chicago that contributed to more than 60 deaths over four years.
Illinois Answers Project Welcomes 2 Reporters to Launch State Embed Initiative

June 10, 2024
The Illinois Answers Project has welcomed two journalists for its new state investigative and solutions team funded by The Richard H. Driehaus Foundation.

Embedded investigative reporters Grace Hauck and Meredith Newman joined the
newsroom this fall and are working to collaborate with local newsrooms across Illinois. The team is also hiring for a third reporter.

The goal of the statewide embed initiative is to pair Illinois Answers’ investigative and solutions resources with the local news judgment and reader expertise of partner newsrooms. The combined effort will produce statewide reports with local relevance, while addressing problems and solutions of consequence in overlooked cities and rural populations statewide.

Initial partner newsrooms include the State Register-Journal in Springfield, the News-Gazette in Champaign, Shaw Local News Network across northern Illinois, and the Journal Star in Peoria.
Meredith Newman, left, and Grace Hauck in Springfield in November.

Grace Hauck was most recently a criminal justice reporter for USA TODAY in Chicago, where she investigated a fraudulent nationwide COVID testing scheme based in Illinois, reported a series of exonerations related to a corrupt former Chicago detective, and spearheaded a nationwide examination of how school
children are prepared for active shooters.

Hauck also reported on national and international breaking news events, including the Highland Park Fourth of July shooting, and numerous high-profile criminal trials, such as the Derek Chauvin trial in the murder of George Floyd.

Previously, she worked at the Deccan Herald in Bangalore. Hauck is a native of New Jersey and she studied at the University of Chicago.

Meredith Newman most recently was an investigative reporter at The News-Journal in Wilmington, Delaware, where she reported on health care, state politics and policy as well as Joe Biden’s presidential campaign.

During the pandemic, her watchdog reporting revealed how nursing homes failed to curb the virus at a time when resident deaths were among the highest in the nation, as well as how Delaware struggled to make vaccines accessible to the Black and Latino communities. Her reporting into assisted living facilities documented how the state failed to provide oversight and funding for more than a decade, leading to unlivable conditions and tragic deaths. She also produced a year-long series on the health care struggles of the Amish community.

Before living in Delaware, Meredith worked at The Capital in Annapolis, Maryland. Newman is a graduate of Syracuse University and is from Evanston, Illinois.

The Illinois Answers Project is a nonprofit, nonpartisan newsroom published by the Better Government Association, the state’s nonprofit full-service watchdog organization. This new statewide initiative is a key component of the Illinois Solutions Plan, a multi-year strategy developed by the BGA to expand its investigative and solutions reporting resources as well as outreach to communities across the state.

The team is hiring another reporter to join in early 2024. For questions about this program or the open position, contact state & solutions editor Rachel Aretakis at raretakis@illinoisanswers.org.
BGA Launching Bold Statewide Initiative Thanks to Driehaus Foundation Support

June 10, 2024

The Better Government Association has received a $1.43 million commitment from the Richard H. Driehaus Foundation to support a novel, statewide expansion by the BGA’s Illinois Answers Project newsroom.

Driehaus Foundation Executive Director Anne Lazar said the award is the first in a series of planned special legacy grants, given in memory of founder Richard H. Driehaus, who died unexpectedly in 2021. These legacy grants are the largest ever awarded by the foundation and are designed to honor Mr. Driehaus and his several interests, including investigative journalism.

The Driehaus resources will enable the BGA’s Illinois Answers Project newsroom to provide reporting resources to newsrooms in cities across Illinois—essentially “embed” work on investigative and solutions-focused stories. The new program is a key component of the Illinois Solutions Plan, a multi-year strategy developed by the BGA to expand its investigative and solutions reporting resources, as well as outreach to communities across the state.
“We wanted to honor Richard’s extraordinary legacy in a special way that would reflect his passion for the initiatives he cared most deeply about and that would be transformational for the grant recipients. The BGA’s Illinois Answers “embed” program is the type of initiative Richard would have been so proud to support,” said Driehaus Foundation Executive Director Anne Lazar. “The Driehaus Foundation has a long history with the Better Government Association. Richard believed strongly in the impact investigative journalism can make so this grant is a meaningful way to pay tribute to him.”

The embed strategy will pair the investigative and solutions journalism expertise of the Illinois Answers Project newsroom with the local-market knowledge of newsrooms across Illinois. This combined effort will produce statewide reports with local relevance, while calling attention to problems affecting overlooked cities and rural populations statewide.

“The Driehaus Foundation’s commitment to the Illinois Answers Project’s statewide embed program continues Mr. Driehaus’ longstanding commitment to reporting that has a positive impact in Illinois,” said David Greising, president of the BGA.

For more than two decades Richard H. Driehaus championed investigative journalism and the importance of the BGA’s watchdog role. In 2004, Driehaus committed to support the Richard H. Driehaus Foundation Awards for Investigative Reporting, which recognize the best investigative reporting in Illinois. The BGA administers the awards, which have received nearly 500 submissions and honored more than 90 investigations.

The new grant represents a three-year commitment both to the Driehaus Awards and the Illinois Answers Project’s new embed program. The BGA intends to hire three reporters and assign each to focus on several different cities statewide.

Driehaus’ investment firm, Driehaus Capital Management, was known for “momentum investing,” by which he doubled down successful investments. Driehaus often said he was honored to play a part in recognizing the value of investigative journalism and doubling down on the BGA’s success. In an interview with Greising in 2020, Driehaus said investigative reporting was a good investment because of its outsized impact. The BGA’s work is “a big deal,” Driehaus said.
In the fourth installment of the BGA’s limited series podcast “The Madigan Rule,” host Justin Kaufmann looks into Michael J. Madigan’s political legacy featuring conversations with former Governors Pat Quinn and Bruce Rauner, State Representative Kelly Cassidy (14th), Former State Representative Ken Dunkin (5th), State Representative La Shawn Ford (8th), State Representative Will Guzzardi (39th), Alaina Hampton, Dave McKinney, John Chase, Pat Brady, Ray Long and Amanda Vinicky.
History’s longest-serving statehouse speaker, Madigan will be remembered less for the policies he enacted than for the power he extracted. In this episode, we explore his political acumen and the infamous showdown with Governor Bruce Rauner.

**Transcript:**

**(00:05):** In 1998, Illinois House Speaker Michael Madigan added another huge piece to his powerful chessboard. He was elected to take over as chairman of the Illinois State Democratic Party. Becoming party chair meant Madigan could control legislation in the house and control which candidates received money and fundraising support from the Democratic Party. The BGA’s John Chase.

**(00:29):** That did open up a world where he didn’t have any interference whatsoever in, in running now, not just the State House, but the state Democratic Party and the Democratic Party was, at that point, the dominant party and has
ever since been in Illinois. And it goes to this point about funding campaigns. Other than a few races, he really just cared about, uh, reelecting or electing new Democrats to the state House of Representatives. He didn’t care really much about Governor, even. He really just you know, he wasn’t supporting the whole party in Cook County or in DuPage County. It was all just about state rep races. And that’s because that’s where his power was.

(01:16): I’m Justin Kaufmann. This is the “Madigan Rule.” This podcast is a production of the Better Government Association, episode three “Power over Policy”.

(01:34): In 2012, Will Guzzardi was a young, progressive Democrat living on Chicago’s Northwest Side. He hated the way machine politicians played favorites and perpetuated the status quo. So he decided to mount an insurgent campaign. He challenged incumbent Democrat state representative Toni Berrios to a primary race. It was a bold move, especially for a political novice. That’s because Berrios wasn’t just any incumbent. She was the daughter of the powerful chair of the Cook County Democratic Party Joe Berrios. She and her dad were both loyal allies of Michael Madigan. Not surprisingly the Guzzardi-Berrios primary attracted a lot of attention and a lot of blowback for Guzzardi, but he did better than many expected. He lost that first election by just 125 votes. Two years later, he challenged Berrios again.

(02:27): Speaker Madigan worked really hard to keep me from having this job. Uh, I ran against the Democratic incumbent and his policy was always to support incumbents. So his political apparatus spent half a million dollars against me and said all kinds of terrible things about me during that campaign. And then I won and it all changed.

(02:53): I saw a very different side of the speaker, a different side of him than I had experienced and a different side than I think people in the general public, think about. A side of him that was funny and welcoming and friendly and engaging and frustrating in lots of ways. But yeah, very different from the Tribune editorial board version of him that we might know. I didn’t know much about Mike Madigan at all before I got into politics. I really did know him as the caricature, you know, as the sorta all powerful puppet master, like subject of endless speculation who never emerges from behind the curtain and, you know, who’s responsible for the outcomes of everything in Springfield. He was really
sort of a cartoon figure to me. After I won my primary, he called me in for a
meeting to his law office downtown, and I was, you know, 26 and terrified. I show
up in in this like oak-paneled boardroom. And he’s just like, tell me what you’re
interested in. And we just had this hour-long conversation. We talk about clean
energy. We talk about, uh, you know, raising the minimum wage, progressive
economic politics. He’s telling me about this biography he’s reading of LBJ. You
know, he’s reading the Caro books at the moment and we talk about like that, that
whole, you know, navigating that process. And he says it in the meeting like,
listen, my job here is to help you succeed. So when you get down to the
legislature, let me know the bills you’re working on and if you ever have any
challenges with it, my goal is to help you get them passed. I was just
flabbergasted. I was expecting a very different approach from him and, and that
turned out to be how he was as a leader, um, in my experience of him anyway. He
would make whatever efforts he could to help out other Democrats and other
colleagues.

(04:44): And, and I think perhaps to a fault. I think that a lot of what sort of has
subsequently come out about him has been that he helped people get jobs and get
placed in places that he shouldn’t have that were unethical and corrupt in ways.
But I think it came from that sort of basic impulse of like rather have you as a
friend than an enemy. In many ways, he really was like that. He really was the
caricature that, um, that has been portrayed in a lot of ways, right. He controlled
the legislative process. It all flowed through him personally. He used that control
to deliver favors and benefits to the people close to him and to the people who he
thought should have those favors and benefits. And then that was a decision made
by him and not by a sort of process of good governance or public policy making.
You know, that stuff is true, but I think it’s like a yes/and situation, where yes,
that is all true of him.

(05:53): And it’s not the caricature that you have seen in the newspapers. That
IPI cartoon of him is not who he is. And like, just to close the loop on this story.
After that first meeting with him, you know, my jaw kinda drops and I’m like,
okay, thanks very much, and I go home. And two days later, there’s a manila
envelope in my mailbox. And it has a note from him. And it’s a copy of that Robert
Caro book that he was talking about “Master of the Senate.” He says, hey, we
talked about this the other day, thought you might be interested. You know, just
like a thoughtful guy who wanted to help people succeed.
Helping a young freshman representative succeed after he just took out a loyal ally, you spent half a million dollars trying to defend could be a profile in sportsmanship or a lesson in how to lose gracefully, or it could be evidence of a realpolitik, the hard-nosed realism of a veteran more concerned with maintaining power than debating policy platforms. Again, Will Guzzardi.

I think he was able to hold onto power for as long as he did. I think one central reason why he was able to hold on to power as long as he did is that he did not let his personal ideological compunctions get in the way of his desire to hold on to power. And that’s not something I can say for myself if I were in his shoes. Like I go to Springfield because there’s a set of values that I believe in. And like, I don’t think I could just sort of ditch those and pick up another set of values to hold onto power, right? Like that’s not how I operate. You look at the issue of choice where like Madigan grew up in an Irish Catholic family and in the church and came into the legislature really anti-choice. And, and there was a lot of space for an Irish, Irish Catholic anti-choice Democrat.

When he came into the legislature in the seventies. Politics changed, the electoral environment, changed the fundraising environment changed, and he was able to really change with that. And to say, I’m going to lead this party in a sort of relentlessly and unflinchingly pro-choice direction to capture the electorate that we need to win, to capture the fundraising base that we need to win. I mean, truly, uh, like a remarkable pivot in that way, that like in the final years of his tenure as speaker, we were passing the most progressive pro-choice legislation in the country, right? Medicaid funding for abortion. I mean really like groundbreaking stuff.

Despite those and other legislative achievements, many say Michael Madigan was far more concerned with maintaining power than advancing any ideology. Pat Brady is the former head of the Illinois Republican Party. He only cares about self-preservation. So if he needs to

Go to the left to keep it in that spot, he’ll do it. And he did it. He, he would do whatever it took to keep him in that spot. Everybody down there, uh, treated him like some kind of God. And he was Mike Madigan and he had his office he didn’t let anybody in. And it was a weird world you couldn’t get beyond Tim Mapes. It was just strange. It’s he’s an odd little guy. And those are questions that a lot of people had, but everybody had to kiss his backside because he had
Brady became chair of the Illinois Republican Party in 2009. At the time the Illinois GOP was decimated. The party had just come off an embarrassing campaign for the US Senate against Barack Obama. Democrats were adding to big majorities in Illinois House and Senate and Democrats also controlled the all-important legislative map. Republicans couldn’t even defeat the scandal-plagued Democratic Governor Rod Blagojevich. Pat Brady knew that the Republican Party needed to change its ways if it was going to have any hope of winning again.

In 2009, my strategy was fire Madigan. It wasn’t so much that we were going to beat Mike Madigan, but we needed to make voters aware of who Mike Madigan is and how he operates. And I remember Rick Pearson, you were probably there at the WGN studios, going hey, we just did a poll and only 29% of the people know who Madigan is. And I go, Rick, that’s my point. Now, 80% of the people know who people is because I think in part what we did in 2010 and what they did in 2016, when I wasn’t chairman, was to point out who Mike Madigan is and how he operates and tie that into how poorly managed the state has been. And I think that was tremendously effective, but that being said, Mike Madigan, uh, in the last couple cycles, had, had, had some big gains. So, you know, mixed bag. But from my perspective, the goal, we set to make people aware of who he is and how he manages the state. I think we were successful. Brady

had planted a seed that others on the political right continued to cultivate. John Tillman is the founder of the Illinois Policy Institute, a conservative think tank.

I sat down and had lunch with two very prominent Chicago business leaders. Names you would know. And had a discussion about this exact subject in 2013. And I made the argument that we can’t fix the state until Mike Madigan is gone and he won’t be gone until, uh, the rank and file members fear their own voters more than they fear Mike Madigan. And the only way they were going to fear their own voters more than they feared Mike Madigan was if he became an albatross. Uh, in politics, you know, the, the political opponents of, uh, tobacco growers and tobacco, uh, processors have done a very good job of making Big Tobacco toxic. Big Oil has been made toxic by some in the political debate. Uh, for a lot of that conversation, uh, we set a goal of not making Mike Madigan toxic, but simply educating the public on the truth of who Mike Madigan was. And the
public would come to its own decisions as to whether or not he was toxic or not. The key to Mike Madigan’s power is there’s not a lot of tape on him. He doesn’t speak publicly very often. Uh, his whole idea is to operate behind the scenes. He is the wizard behind the curtain. We want to pull back the curtain and tell his story. So we started writing about him in 2013, 2014, 2015 with a much greater frequency and in depth started examining his rules back then and educating people on how his power actually worked.

(12:14): By this time, wealthy Chicago businessman Bruce Rauner was becoming more involved in local politics and public policy. He was a rising campaign funder, a philanthropist and civic leader. That’s how he first met Chicago politicians like Mike Madigan.

(12:29): He knew that I was a big Democratic funder. I was a huge funder of Rich Daley and other Democrats. And, and he said, uh, you know, I was school reformer. Bruce, I’d love to work with you and see what we can do to help improve the schools. And I’m like, awesome. That’s fantastic. I’ve heard. So we met, he came to my office, my business office downtown. We had a very cordial meeting. We were both buttering each other up. You know, he wanted some of the money from the PAC. I wanted his support for legislative changes and we were, you know, had an interesting, good, very positive. He was a funny guy, gregarious, really. We had a lot of fun. And, uh, so we had our first meeting. Then we had a second meeting. We actually had breakfast together and we had multiple meetings and meals together over the, over that time.

(13:10): In that window of time, the second meeting, we’re alone, just the two of us over at the Chicago Club. And we’re getting to know each other, we’re buttering each other up. You know, he wants, you know, I’m a fairly successful business guy. I got a lot of money. I fund Democrats. He loves that. I need him, you know, we’re talking family, we’re talking politics we’re yucking it up and shining each other’s knobs. And you know, we’re going to need each other work if we’re to work together. And during the course of that discussion, I said, so Mike, you’re the most powerful politician, maybe in Illinois history. I mean, you, it’s incredible your power. Like, what’s it. Tell me about that. What, what’s your goal? What do you want to do with that? And he said, I don’t know, Bruce. I just like to work.

(13:46): I just love to work. And I said, oh, that’s a blessing. Yeah. We all, I love
to work too, but I mean, you must have a goal. Like, what’s your goal for improving the quality of life for the people of Illinois, as the most powerful politician in the state. And he looked at me like I had three heads and he laughed and he said, Bruce, I got no goal like that. I don’t even think about that. I said, really what so? And he said, Bruce, I do two things. I manage power and I make money from managing power. And I said, uh, I didn’t know what to say. I sorta choked on my egg a little bit. And then I was like, okay, uh, like I got that. And boy, has he ever been successful in accomplishing his goals. I mean, good grief.

(14:24): Rauner had supported both Democratic and Republican candidates as a donor, but his politics lean to the right. He grew increasingly frustrated with political corruption in Illinois and the gridlock in Springfield. So he decided to run for governor. And in 2014 he became the Republican Party’s nominee. Even though Illinois had trended solidly Democratic in recent years, Rauner was able to narrowly defeat the incumbent Pat Quinn. That’s the same Pat Quinn who launched a cutback amendment drive Madigan despised years ago. And even though they were both Democrats, Quinn and Madigan battled mightily during Quinn’s time as governor. Well, it was very hard.

(15:02): I think anybody would tell you that. Probably Mike Madigan would say that. Uh, he’s, you know, doesn’t yield easily. He and I disagreed on many, many things, especially on direct democracy and on ideas about ethics and reform. He wasn’t really interested in my ideas.

(15:21): When Rauner took over as governor, he didn’t find Madigan any easier to deal with. The two went toe to toe on everything from budgets to workers’ compensation reform to public sector unions. The battles between Rauner and Madigan were daily front-page news, and they created a legislative and budgetary stalemate for months. State workers were furloughed. Social service providers went unpaid as the two battled for control over the budget. Their fight culminated in a dramatic scene on the floor of the Illinois House. Rauner had vetoed a key bill that Madigan supported. Madigan was now trying to get the legislature to vote to override Rauner’s veto. It required a vote from three-fifths of the House to succeed. Everyone knew the vote would be close. Again, Bruce Rauner.

(16:06): I was able to get one legislator to stay away when I vetoed a spending bill that was going to crush taxpayers in Illinois. I vetoed the bill. Madigan has a super majority, he was going to beat me. I convinced that legislator to stay at the,
uh, at the, uh, the US Open tennis tournament in New York and not show up for the, um, the veto override. Uh, we beat him. My veto stood and he had a super majority. He was apoplectic. He was furious. I’ve never seen him so pissed. And he was like, and what did he do? He brought President Obama, a sitting United States president back to Chicago to campaign in a primary for a state legislative seat. That has never happened in US history. It shows the muscle that Madigan has to get a sitting US President to come back and campaign on behalf of one of Madigan’s people so that he could knock out one of his opponents. It’s extraordinary.

(17:01): It was a bunch of bull crap.

(17:03): The state representative who stayed away, Democrat Ken Dunkin.

(17:07): Every single person knows that Mike Madigan could suspend the rules, or he could play by the rules. Leaders or people who are in charge of a mob or a gang or legislative body for that matter, they’re going to do everything that they can to set precedent for the good guys and the bad guys. And I was one of those individuals who happen to think independently, not Republican, not Democrat, but really for the best interest of the state, because when Mike Madigan was in place, it was nothing about anything about the citizens by and large. There were some exceptions, of course, but it was about what Mike Madigan wanted. There was not about me not being somewhere. It was about Mike Madigan seizing, an uh, me, presenting an opportunity for him to seize and take advantage of and create a narrative that he wanted to address really through Governor Bruce Rauner.

(18:04): I was merely the pawn. Prior to Obama getting involved in a local statehouse race. There was legislation that moved through the House, and it passed, that said, we’re going to grant $100 million to the Barack Obama Library or Obama Center. That’s legislative fact. And so I had to believe that a sitting president of the most powerful nation in the world, getting involved in a race where there are 118 members that had to be something additional that incentivized him to get into a mere race of someone who played basketball with someone who served in the, in the legislature with, and someone who had visited the White House several times with him sitting as the president. I wasn’t in the room or what catapults him, Barack Obama, to support someone that he had never even met. But Mike Madigan again is known for creating a narrative and
he’ll use anything and anybody to push his agenda and, or play people against
themselves to his advantage.

(19:19): In the end, both Dunkin and Rauner failed to win re-election. They may
have won the legislative battle to stop the veto override, but they lost the war.
Again, the Illinois Policy Institute’s John Tillman.

(19:32): The thing that Governor Rauner misunderstood about that election.
When he won in 2014 was people weren’t voting for him. They were rejecting
Governor Quinn and his governance. And so I call that a repudiation election. And
so when you become governor after repudiation election, your job is to get people
to support your agenda and go out and sell. And instead, what Governor Rauner
did is he took on Madigan and the unions and all their power directly head-on
instead of finding ways on the margins to start winning people over. And I
thought that was a strategic error, which of course I, to be clear, I said at the
time, and have said ever since. I didn’t say this after the fact. Uh, the second
mistake that Madigan made was Madigan in his power-hungry ways, and he could
not get past his joy. He wanted to destroy, uh, Governor Rauner.

(20:19): Many criticized Rauner for not finding a way to work more effectively
with Madigan. Others simply felt the political newcomer was outplayed by the
political veteran. But Bruce Rauner doesn’t see it that way.

(20:30): So I got to tell you, Justin, I’ve been approached by more than a dozen
Democratic legislators who were in office while I was governor. Some are still in
office, some aren’t. Who come to me and said, Bruce, we should have, we should
have just done a deal with you. Everything would be so much better, but Mike
wouldn’t, you know, Speaker wouldn’t do it. He just would not negotiate anything.
And it’s it’s, it’s so tragic. This was good government. Did Mike Madigan want
good government? Hell no. He wanted the political power. And he wanted me
gone. And he succeeded. By blocking me out, they could say, well, he was a do-
nothing, governor, he should be tossed. In the end we took each other out. I
defined him as a crook. And that’s how they were able to defeat the property, the
income tax hike. And the Democrats said, we can’t let you there, Mike, Mike
you’re too much of a foil. You got to go. They tossed him because of my definition
of him. They tossed me cause I couldn’t get stuff done because he wouldn’t let
me. We took each other out.
But the cost to the Rauner-Madigan battles, isn’t just measured in the career fortunes of two powerful politicians. It’s measured in the toll it took on the state and its citizens. By the time Rauner left office in 2018, Illinois’ unpaid pension deficit had ballooned to record high and the state’s bond rating dipped to record lows and Illinois ranked near the bottom of all 50 states in several financial categories. The problems weren’t all Rauner’s fault. They’d been mounting for decades across multiple administrations, but neither Governor Rauner nor Governor Quinn before him could find a way to fix them. By the 2018 election more and more Illinoisans, including some Democrats were pinning the blame on the one constant in Illinois politics, Michael J. Madigan. Next time on “The Madigan Rule”, the downfall, how state finances, political scandals, and the #MeToo Movement spelled the beginning of the end for Madigan.

I was terrified. There was no HR set up in this organization. So the only two options I had to report it to was the brother of my harasser or the most powerful politician in the state. Mike Madigan.

The Madigan Rule is produced by me, Justin Kaufmann, with the Better Government Association. The Executive Producer, David Greising. Steve Edwards gets a big thanks for story consulting. Alex Sugihara did the music. To find out more about the BGA’s investigative reporting and watchdog efforts go to bettergov.org.