

*This article originally appeared in Crain's Chicago Business on January 21, 2013 and can be found [here](#) ."*

By Paul Merrion

Since his election to Congress nearly four years ago, Rep. Mike Quigley has hauled garbage, swept streets and cleaned the rhino pen at Lincoln Park Zoo in his "Undercover Congressman" shtick, a series of one-day publicity stunts to keep in touch with constituents.

"D.C. can be a very isolating place," the former Cook County commissioner says.



*Rep. Mike Quigley fought hard to get through the door of the House Appropriations Committee. (Martin Simon)*

While Illinois Sens. Dick Durbin and Mark Kirk create a bipartisan tag team on the Senate Appropriations Committee, it was important for Illinois to maintain a House seat it's held almost continuously since the congressional power center was created during the last weeks of the Civil War. (Its first chairman was Rep. Thaddeus Stevens, R-Pa., played by Tommy Lee Jones in Steven Spielberg's "Lincoln.") He won't be lonely for long. As the only Illinois member of the

money-distributing House Appropriations Committee, Mr. Quigley will be hearing a lot from folks back home—even as a junior Democrat on a GOP-controlled panel constrained by demands for spending cuts and a clampdown on “earmarks” that steer money directly to constituents.

Mr. Quigley, an ally of both Illinois senators, has earned a reputation as a thoughtful, hardworking pragmatist, which should fit well with the largely collegial, highly detail-oriented appropriations process. “I think he's a breath of fresh air in the delegation,” Illinois Chamber of Commerce CEO Doug Whitley says. “In today's Congress, that's what we need, more of Mike Quigley's view of the world: Let's get things done.”

Since World War II, Illinois has enjoyed having up to four seats on the House appropriations panel, but it's vital to have at least one advocate for the state in both chambers because any state or local spending priority has a far better chance of survival if it doesn't become a bargaining chip when differences are worked out between House and Senate bills.

“Having a vote, having a seat at the table where money is spent is, in my mind, the most important thing,” says the CTA-riding congressman, who intends to make Chicago transportation infrastructure a top priority. “No matter what issue you care about—so much is how much resources are you putting into that.” He'll serve on two subcommittees, transportation and financial services.

But he also sees the post as a “bully pulpit” to push federal spending reforms. He embraces the “go big” philosophy, cutting the deficit by \$4 trillion over a decade. On the other hand, he sees earmarks coming back eventually, with reforms.

## HARD SELL

Mr. Quigley replaced Jesse Jackson Jr. on the committee, but the resignation of one Chicago Democrat did not create a clear pathway for another. Over the past few months, Mr. Quigley has had to lobby hard for the post, with help from Mr. Durbin and other Illinois Democrats as well as Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel, his predecessor in the Northwest Side district.

One thing he had to overcome was resistance from the Congressional Black Caucus. “You could say this is a seat that ought to go to an African-American, because Jesse was leaving,” says Rep. Danny Davis, D-Chicago, who helped Mr. Quigley ease those concerns. “On the other hand, there was a notion that it should go to someone from Illinois.”

Says Rep. Bobby Rush, D-Chicago: “There were conversations, one-on-one conversations, a number of them. The issue never should have come up about being a member of the black caucus.”

A pugnacious reformer since his Cook County days and an avid hockey player, Mr. Quigley has a political fundraising committee called Puck PAC and he's fond of Wayne Gretzky's advice to play “where the puck is going to be,” not where it is. But he can be just as much an infighter as a policy wonk—just ask Rep. Charles Rangel, D-N.Y., who was forced to step down as chairman of the Ways and Means Committee after Mr. Quigley and a few other representatives raised concerns about an ethics probe.

“Knowing how to throw an elbow in the appropriations process will serve him and his district and Chicago well,” says Washington lobbyist Gary LaPaille, a former state senator and chairman of the Illinois Democratic Party.

Despite speculation he might run for Senate someday, getting on appropriations “would be more likely to make me want to stay here,” the 54-year-old congressman says. “I'm fairly young and fairly healthy for this business. This is a great committee to be on when you start building seniority.”

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