

## Legislator Pays the Price for Fighting Illinois House Speaker Madigan

Written by Rich Miller

Tuesday, 18 March 2003 18:00

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Back in the day, Ray Frias was one of the sharpest political operators at the Illinois statehouse. The Chicago south-sider was first elected to the Illinois House in 1992 after securing the unlikely support of the Illinois State Medical Society, a usually Republican-leaning group with very deep pockets.

The money from the docs allowed Frias to be more independent of House Speaker Michael Madigan than the average Democratic legislator, and Frias took full advantage. Along with two other Hispanic state representatives, self-dubbed the "Tres Amigos," and with advice from anti-Madigan former Democratic state Representative Al Ronan (who also had close ties to the medical society), Frias wheeled and dealt with the best of them. He was amazingly successful in the House, considering his youth and relative inexperience, holding up important bills until he and the other Amigos were able to get what they wanted.

But what Frias really wanted was a seat on the Chicago city council. He had run and lost a race for alderman in 1991, and in 1995 he was back on the campaign trail. By then, he had built a strong local organization, and his bevy of cash-heavy contributors helped push the tireless campaigner to victory.

The success quickly went to his head. He appointed his completely inexperienced and meek brother, Fernando, to his House seat when he made the move to the council. Fernando lost the seat the following year to the liberal, anti-Daley Sonia Silva.

In 1997, Frias was popped by the feds in the Operation Silver Shovel investigation. The alderman claimed he was entrapped, and admitted under oath that he accepted a \$500 bribe from a federal mole, but he was acquitted and re-elected in 1999.

A year after his re-election, a close Frias ally, Susana Mendoza, defeated Representative Silva, and Frias appeared to be back on top of his game. But he reached too far.

Last year, Frias and Representative Mendoza backed two Republican legislative candidates. Bad move. The two endorsements ran directly counter to the aims of the hugely powerful

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Hispanic Democratic Organization (HDO), run by Victor Reyes, one of Mayor Richard Daley's closest pals.

Frias' candidate for state Senate was Roberto Garcia, a Cicero Republican. Garcia was up against Martin Sandoval, who had the support of Mayor Daley and Speaker Madigan. The district even includes part of Madigan's 13th Ward, so Frias was essentially directly fighting Madigan's organization. Not good.

Sandoval freaked out toward the end of the campaign, convinced that the vaunted Cicero Republican organization might sink him in November. The Senate Democrats were forced to spend big money in the final weeks, and the Hispanic Democratic Organization and Madigan's operation had to divert precinct workers to the fight. Sandoval won, and Frias was not forgiven.

To make matters worse, the Republican House candidate Frias backed won his race against a Democrat backed by Madigan and the HDO. Frias had to go.

So, the HDO recruited a candidate to run against Frias in this year's aldermanic race. Frias went into the contest thinking that he had the support of Mayor Daley, his brother John (an influential member of the Cook County Board), and Speaker Madigan. Wrong. Mayor Daley took a pass, John Daley flipped at the last minute, and Madigan contributed money to the HDO.

Frias lost the aldermanic race to the HDO candidate by 51 votes, but because of a third candidate, both men received less than 50 percent, which forced a runoff election.

Frias had problems raising money after spending himself dry in the primary. And he discovered that most of his precinct workers were more loyal to Daley than to him.

Frias dropped out of the race last week. Word is he had tried to secure a city job in exchange for his withdrawal but was turned down. Instead, the powers-that-be pledged not to interfere with his hopes of getting a state-government position from his old friend, Governor Rod Blagojevich.

The big question now is what happens to Frias' ally, Representative Mendoza.

It's not known whether it's too late for Mendoza to cut a deal to save herself, but the thinking is that she's probably a goner. Mendoza's public comments about fellow legislators who backed Frias' opponent were at times over-the-top. Most people understand her fierce loyalty to Frias, the man who brought her into the political business, but some of those bruised egos won't heal anytime soon. The HDO is already reportedly searching for a candidate against Mendoza.

Mendoza carries almost none of Frias' hefty baggage. And she's a much harder worker. But hard work alone doesn't cut it in Chicago's Hispanic precincts, where the HDO now reigns supreme.

*Rich Miller also publishes Capitol Fax, a daily political newsletter. He can be reached at*

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*(<http://www.capitolfax.com>).*