

Chicago's Fires Threaten to Engulf Mayor

Once one of the nation's most powerful men, Rahm Emanuel is now fighting for political survival.

BY KARI LYDERSEN AND DAWN REISS

LONG KNOWN UNDER THE NAME Second City, Chicago has become in fact two cities.

One glints with sleek downtown hotels, resplendent office towers, upscale eateries, and tony neighborhoods. The other is mired in urban squalor, racial division, economic inequality, and almost daily violence.

It is in that second, beleaguered burg that Rahm Emanuel, the famously blunt mayor, now finds himself facing an uncertain re-election bid. His biggest problem: He may not be liberal enough to keep the peace in Chicago.

That may come as a surprise to conservatives, who remember Emanuel as the progressive operative who relentlessly pushed President Obama's healthcare reforms through Congress. But in Chicago, Emanuel is often portrayed as an apologist for the top 1 percent, and a symbol of a growing racial and class divide that sociologists fear could tear the city apart.

"There's a sense of arrogance about Rahm and his administration," says Dick Simpson, a former alderman and professor of political science at the University of Illinois at Chicago. "It's my way or the highway. That causes a lot of people to not like him very

much." Contrary to his national image as a prominent liberal, Emanuel in a Chicago context is viewed as more of a pro-business centrist in the Bill Clinton tradition. It can be dangerous political turf to defend in a city riven by class and race. By way of perspective, Chicago last elected a Republican mayor in 1931.

While supporters hail Emanuel's policies on urban planning, school reform, and public-private investment as excellent national models, other observers worry about the city's growing roster of social, financial, and political problems.

The surprise announcement in September 2010 that then-Mayor Richard M. Daley, scion of the father-son dynasty that ran the Windy City for over four decades, would not seek re-election was enough to lure Emanuel to leave his West Wing perch as one of the nation's most powerful men. After all, becoming mayor of Chicago would fulfill a lifelong

ambition. The business community welcomed him with open arms and open wallets. Thanks in part to public support from President Obama and former President Clinton, Emanuel also won over African-American voters. In the February 2011 election,



MAYORAL CANDIDATES Jesus Garcia, left, and Bob Fioretti.



RAHM'S RULE Protesters (including the Rev. Jesse Jackson, center) rally against school closures on March 27, 2013. Emanuel said the closings were necessary due to academic failures.

Emanuel won 55 percent of the vote, easily avoiding a runoff.

At his mayoral victory party, Emanuel received a homecoming fit for a king.

"You sure know how to make a guy feel at home," he proclaimed to the cheering throng.

Four years later, it is safe to say that things have not gone quite as Emanuel envisioned. An August *Chicago Tribune* poll showed his approval rating dropping to just 35 percent. Among African-Americans it was even lower, just 26 percent — troubling news in a city where one-in-three voters is black.

Now, facing a Feb. 24 re-election showdown, it is by no means certain that Emanuel's fundraising prowess,





shut down nearly 50 Chicago public schools, thus infuriating the powerful teachers union. Compounding this was adoption of a highly controversial speed camera system, which resulted in scores of pricey tickets for heavy-footed motorists who failed to slow down near parks and schools.

But an investigation by ABC-7 in Chicago showed Emanuel's own motorcades had been blowing through the speed zones along these same stretches, and ignoring the automatically generated citations.

A blizzard of trouble has buffetted Emanuel's Chicago. His move to restore solvency to the city's pension system — which faces an unfunded liability of \$20 billion — has met with strong resistance as well. Perhaps

unfairly, Emanuel also has been tagged with the sobriquet "Murder Mayor," due to the city's high homicide rate. The city's bond rating, moreover, has been lowered four times in eight months, and now stands barely above junk-bond status.

Much of the chaos awaited Emanuel on day one, a legacy of his predecessor's reluctance to alienate unions or risk unpopu-

lar belt-tightening. "Almost all of it was inherited," says University of Chicago political scientist John Bream.

The serial setbacks could have overwhelmed a lesser figure, but Emanuel appeared undaunted. It was the one-time recipient of a scholarship to the Joffrey Ballet, after all, who infamously remarked during his White House years: "You never let a serious crisis go to waste."

Chicago, it seemed, was a veritable land of opportunity.

REINVENTING THE SECOND CITY

The thing about Emanuel is he always has a plan. His strategy with Chicago was to position it as a hub, a spawning ground for startups specializing in technology and clean-energy. He also hoped to make it a playground for the creative class and the arts.

In some ways, Emanuel has delivered. His administration has boosted tourism to record highs, in part because he raised Chicago's profile on the national and international stage.

In 2012, the Windy City hosted the NATO international summit. It landed the futuristic Lucas Museum of Narrative Art established by *Star Wars* auteur George Lucas. And later this year the James Beard Awards — the Oscars of the American food industry — will be held for the first time outside of New York. Chicago will also host the 2015 NFL draft — the first time the draft has been held outside New York since 1963.

"It seems like every time you turn around there is something new that Chicago has landed," observes Mary-Sue Barrett, president of the city's Metropolitan Planning Council.

Emanuel also has amassed an impressive record of recruiting new corporate citizens. Among them: United Continental Holdings, GE Transportation, Archer Daniels Midland, Motorola Mobility, and Sara Lee.

By most accounts, Emanuel has made Chicago a more business-friendly climate, in part by eliminating the "head tax" that employers loved to hate. The mayor's office claims new startups are launched in Chicago at a rate of one per day. Fortune.com rates it the 10th best city in the world in which to start a new business.

As one might expect, the private sector plays a central role in Emanuel's vision of municipal leadership. His administration has focused on inviting private investment into the public sector, and unfettering busi-



national connections, and friends in the financial community will be enough to avert a run-off.

In November, a Chicago Teachers Union poll showed Emanuel leading the three-way contest with 33 percent of the vote. Cook County Commissioner Jesus "Chuy" Garcia was second with 18 percent, and 2nd Ward Alderman Bob Fioretti won 13 percent.

Emanuel's fall from grace comes after several political fumbles. To shore up the city's budget, Emanuel

nesses from regulations. In some ways, it's an approach more familiar to Republicans than Democrats.

Doug Ibendahl, a Chicago attorney and former attorney for the Illinois Republican Party, quips: "In a different world, maybe Emanuel would even be a Republican."

That sort of talk doesn't win Emanuel many points with union leaders or in inner-city neighborhoods, however. Shortly after taking office, Emanuel moved to lengthen the school day — among the shortest days of any major city. He did this as his hand-picked Board of Education also moved to freeze scheduled raises for teachers.

The result: In September 2012, the union went on strike for seven days. Thousands of teachers sporting red T-shirts poured into the streets. The parties eventually hammered out a new contract, but the union was perceived as getting the better of Emanuel in the negotiations.

That wasn't Emanuel's only union run-in. Powerful SEIU Local 1 waged an intense public relations campaign against him after he terminated janitorial contracts at the airport, public schools, and police stations, costing scores of union janitors their jobs. During the 2012 Christmas holidays, throngs of largely Polish and Mexican janitors gathered downtown on a busy street. Their Christmas message to the mayor: Twinkling lights that spelled out "Rahm Job Killer."

WELL-HEELED SUPPORTERS

Emanuel has accumulated a huge campaign war chest of over \$10 million, in part by leveraging his connections in the financial community. He can also expect plenty of help from the Chicago Forward super-PAC, which his well-heeled supporters established in June. In just a couple months, the PAC amassed close to \$2.5 million.

"I think the reports of Rahm's demise are premature," says former

ing Emanuel by over 20 points in a July poll by the *Chicago Sun-Times*. But Preckwinkle, claiming cleaning up Cook County as her top priority, decided not to run.

Another potential candidate, Chicago Teachers Union president Karen Lewis, made a strong showing in early polls as well. Then in October, she announced that she would not be running after receiving a diagnosis of cancer. Many experts, and even

some enemies, expect Emanuel to defeat Garcia and Fioretti on Election Day. But whether Emanuel can avoid a harrowing run-off may depend on whether he can rein in his notorious "my way or the highway" approach.

Political observers say they've already seen signs of a "kinder and gentler" Rahm. He cut back on appearances with big-business leaders, and replaced them with photo ops of ribbon cuttings in impoverished neighborhoods. His news conferences of late tend to spotlight pre-K programs, affordable housing initiatives, and college scholarships.

Whether those efforts can ease frustrations remains to be seen.

Soon, his ability to use a good crisis will be put to the ultimate test. □

Kari Lydersen is a Chicago freelance writer and author of *Mayor 1%: Rahm Emanuel and the Rise of Chicago's 99%*.

Dawn Reiss is an award-winning journalist who covered the Rod Blagojevich trial for *Time* magazine and *Time.com*.

State of Mind – Political Leanings

BY DAVID A. PATTEN

Chicago, with its public-sector unions and class warfare, may be too liberal for a center-left Democrat like Mayor Rahm Emanuel. But it actually doesn't rate as one of the 10 most liberal cities in America.

In fact, San Francisco, Washington, D.C., and New York all qualify as more liberal than Chicago, according to a study published in the *American Political Science Review* study.

Researchers surveyed residents in cities of 250,000 or more people. The goal was to determine whether they had conservative or liberal leanings. Their findings:

10 Most Liberal U.S. Cities	10 Most Conservative U.S. Cities
1. San Francisco, Calif.	1. Mesa, Ariz.
2. Washington, D.C.	2. Oklahoma City, Okla.
3. Seattle, Wash.	3. Virginia Beach, Va.
4. Oakland, Calif.	4. Colorado Springs, Colo.
5. Boston, Mass.	5. Jacksonville, Fla.
6. Minneapolis, Minn.	6. Arlington, Texas
7. Detroit, Mich.	7. Anaheim, Calif.
8. New York, N.Y.	8. Omaha, Neb.
9. Buffalo, N.Y.	9. Tulsa, Okla.
10. Baltimore, Md.	10. Aurora, Colo.

SOURCE: American Political Science Review

GOP lawyer Ibendahl. "In the past, there would be polls about Rich Daley, about how his numbers were down . . . and then the election would come around and he would win with 70 percent of the vote."

Two candidates were given a realistic chance of beating him.

Both of them bowed out. Popular Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle was shown crush-