

CRAIN'S CHICAGO BUSINESS

December 16, 2019 01:48 PM | UPDATED 21 HOURS AGO

The most powerful Chicagoans now

This ranking of the 25 most influential leaders in Chicago would have looked a lot different a year ago. Such is the fleeting nature of clout in these turbulent times.

BY A.D. QUIG, LYNNE MAREK, JOHN PLETZ AND DANNY ECKER



CRAIN'S CHICAGO BUSINESS

POWER 25

This ranking of the 25 most influential leaders in Chicago would have looked a lot different a year ago. Such is the fleeting nature of clout in these turbulent times.

Power is dynamic. The 2019 ranking of the 25 most powerful people in Chicago would have looked very different if Crain's had published it last year—or even six months ago. Mayor Rahm Emanuel, for instance, would have been a natural for the top five not so long ago, but now he's a private citizen, hitting the national punditry circuit. Senate President John Cullerton is retiring, closing a chapter on the storied Cullerton political clan in Chicago. Julia Stasch, longtime head of the MacArthur Foundation and a familiar face on boards across the city, retired from her role this fall. Lori Healy, a fixture in and around City Hall—most recently at the Metropolitan Pier & Exposition Authority—has exited for the private sector.

WEIGH IN



Disagree with our ranking? That's half the fun. Let us hear from you on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).

C-suite power has shifted as well: Boeing CEO Dennis Muilenberg is under the microscope, having lost his chairmanship role after two 737 Max crashes left hundreds dead. McDonald's CEO Steve Easterbrook was fired after a consensual relationship with an employee. Local health care companies and hospitals have seen an exodus of leadership as well.

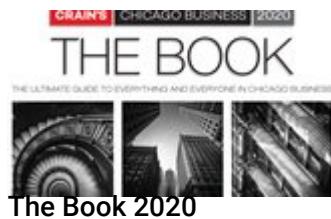
Then there's the dragnet column. Ald. Ed Burke—previously chairman of the City Council's Finance Committee and one of Chicago's most prolific political fundraisers—has been one of the first casualties of the man who now occupies No. 4 on Crain's power list. And one of Illinois' most powerful women, Anne Pramaggiore, has stepped down both as a senior executive at Exelon and as chair of the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago as the feds scrutinize the lobbying practices of Exelon and its Commonwealth Edison subsidiary.

This snapshot of the city's current top 25 power players takes into account factors including sphere of influence, access to capital, corporate and civic connections, and old-fashioned newsworthiness. By winnowing this list to 25 rather than, say, 50, the editors left aside

certain long-standing business titans such as billionaire civic booster Joe Mansueto, as well as rising stars such as the YWCA of Chicago's Dorri McWhorter. Might those names appear on a 2020 ranking? As we have seen, a lot can change in 12 months.

This ranking is published as part of [The Book](#), Crain's annual compendium of information and data on the people, companies and organizations powering Chicago's economy.

MORE



Getty Images

J. B. Pritzker

1. J.B. PRITZKER

Governor of Illinois

Pritzker, still in his first year as Illinois governor, would have ranked high on this list even if he weren't in charge of the state, thanks to a combination of his net worth (an estimated \$3.4 billion), his mega-influential family (nine Pritzkers made it onto the Forbes 400), his experience in the venture- and private-capital world, and his philanthropic efforts.

That clout has only expanded now that Pritzker runs the entire state (roughly 60,000 employees). He emerged from the last full legislative session with major rewrites of the state's gambling rules, a brand new recreational marijuana program, a \$45 billion infrastructure program and the first step toward his "fair tax" that he says will help right the state's still shaky fiscal ship.

Implementation of all of those—and the fallout from federal investigations rocking major industries and established Springfield fixtures—will be the next major test of the governor's political pull.



Stephen J. Serio

2. LORI LIGHTFOOT

Mayor of Chicago

Lightfoot, a political neophyte, came into office winning every single ward and enjoying an approval rating hovering around the 70s (per her team). She immediately faced a laundry list of issues that could trail from her fifth-floor City Hall office down to LaSalle Street. Lightfoot has taken her first steps to address the city's crime problem and rebuild trust in the Police Department, submitted her premiere budget and has started making her imprint on the city's myriad boards and departments.

The mayor directly commands dozens of city departments, more than 33,000 city employees and leadership of the Chicago Public Schools, Housing Authority, Park District, City Colleges and Transit Authority.

But she's still learning the ropes: A significant portion of the city's future depends on help from Springfield, and though Lightfoot is loath to describe them as losses, she has emerged bruised from the Chicago Teachers Union's 11-day strike and the veto session in Springfield.



Melody Hobson

3. MELLODY HOBSON

President and co-CEO, Ariel Investments

Along with No. 9 John Rogers, Hobson leads one of the city's biggest asset managers and has become a leading national voice for corporate diversity. Despite splitting her time between Chicago and Los Angeles, she holds Mayor Lori Lightfoot's ear as vice chair of World Business Chicago, the city's economic development arm—all while sitting on the boards of Starbucks and JPMorgan Chase and helping husband George Lucas build his namesake museum on the West Coast (after a losing battle to bring it to Chicago's lakefront).



AP Images

John Lausch

4. JOHN LAUSCH

U.S. attorney for the Northern District of Illinois

If you haven't heard his name, you know his work. Without fanfare (butcher paper on windows and agents who don't spout off to press) and with years of groundwork laid by his predecessor and rank and file, Lausch's office has already kneecapped one of Chicago's most powerful aldermen (Ed Burke); forced the resignation of one of the state's most established Latino politicians (former state Rep. Luis Arroyo Sr.); shook up the leadership at Exelon, one of the nation's biggest utilities; and cast a chill over Chicago and Springfield. The office reportedly is looking into many other powerful people (Michael Madigan included) and lucrative industries—lobbyists, elected officials and gambling, red light and transportation companies. Lausch has the firepower, and time, to upend much more, but will also have to secure convictions.



AP Images

Michael Madigan

5. MICHAEL MADIGAN

Speaker, Illinois House of Representatives

"Don't be fooled. He hasn't lost an iota of power," one longtime political watcher says. Despite No. 4's probing around Madigan's associates and a sexual harassment scandal that led to

the expulsion of top aides, the longtime speaker still holds the keys to getting things done in Springfield through his consolidated power in the House, the state's Democratic Party apparatus and an alumni network of aides and former lawmakers. He helped Gov. J.B. Pritzker usher through much of his first-session agenda and, despite years of targeted attacks from former Gov. Bruce Rauner, netted seven new Democratic members in House ranks in the 2018 election, regaining his "supermajority" status. Still, the near constant attacks on Madigan have taken a toll.



Paul Elledge

Ken Griffin

6. KEN GRIFFIN

Founder and CEO, Citadel

Griffin is one of very few people in Chicago who, with the sweep of a pen, can get not just a wing but an entire museum named after him. The hedge fund he founded, Citadel, is also beating out stumbling and shrinking competitors, growing to manage more than \$32 billion. Though key political allies have exited office—former Gov. Bruce Rauner and Mayor Rahm Emanuel, namely—Griffin has an undeniable reach in the city's business and cultural

community. Illinois' richest man has given roughly \$1 billion to the soon-to-be-namesake Museum of Science & Industry, the University of Chicago, Lurie Children's Hospital, the Field Museum, the Art Institute and other organizations, and he has chipped in to expand the city's lakefront path and launch crime-fighting tech centers in neighborhoods experiencing violence.



Erik Unger

Toni Preckwinkle

7. TONI PRECKWINKLE

President, Cook County Board

This political veteran has been through tough battles before. She's now weathered a blistering loss in the mayoral race and the sound defeat of the sweetened-beverage tax she championed. Even still, Preckwinkle runs the second-most-populous county in America (with a no-tax-hike budget this year) and helps oversee two critical systems: criminal justice and a health network that shoulders a majority of the charity care in the county. Plus, she helms the Cook County Democratic Party, which she says she wants to grow to a bigger tent.



Erik Unger

Curt Bailey

8. CURT BAILEY

President, Related Midwest

Related's "the 78," a brand-new neighborhood being built on top of the biggest undeveloped parcel of land near downtown Chicago, is perhaps the city's most ambitious making-something-out-of-nothing effort since the creation of Streeterville. The plan includes another transformative element: the Discovery Partners Institute, a University of Illinois initiative that, if built, promises to be a catalyst for Chicago's tech ambitions. The 78 project follows on major Related developments: the luxury One Bennett Park skyscraper, the rejuvenation of the Lathrop Homes and a new approach to affordable housing in Little Italy. While his crosstown rival, Sterling Bay's Andy Gloor, has been ensnared in a massive political battle surrounding his similarly scaled Lincoln Yards project, Bailey has been moving ahead on his South Loop vision with relatively mild pushback.



Todd Winters

John Rogers

9. JOHN ROGERS

Chairman, co-CEO and chief investment officer, Ariel Investments

Rogers leads, along with No. 3 Mellody Hobson, the biggest minority-owned investment management firm in the state with significant clout and respect among elected and business officials statewide. He serves on some of the most powerful boards in the city and nation, including the Obama Foundation, McDonald's, Nike, the New York Times, the University of Chicago and the Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice & Human Rights. Pick a major civic endeavor over the past two decades, and you'll find Rogers' name attached to it. Besides, anyone with the audacity to take on basketball legend Michael Jordan in a game of one-on-one deserves respect.



Manuel Martinez

Erik Lefkofsky

10. ERIC LEFKOFSKY

CEO, Tempus; chairman, Groupon

He's the best-known tech entrepreneur in Chicago. Lefkofsky built three companies that went public—including Groupon and Echo Global Logistics, with longtime partner Brad Keywell—while also investing in promising startups. Lefkofsky's latest venture is no less ambitious than seeking a cure for cancer. Specifically, Tempus aims to help doctors use data to battle this dreaded killer.



University of Chicago

Robert Zimmer

11. ROBERT ZIMMER

President, University of Chicago

Zimmer has been president of the University of Chicago since 2006, overseeing the Hyde Park school's rise in multiple independent rankings that name it one of the best universities in the world. He has overseen dramatic growth in its undergraduate student population. The university has benefited from his ability to tap wealthy board members and alums for billions of dollars in donations.



Bloomberg

Sam Zell

12. SAM ZELL

Founder and chairman, Equity Group Investments

Illinois' second-wealthiest man, behind Ken Griffin, Zell is a force in real estate, energy and media, serving on five NYSE-listed company boards, as well as EGI and Equity Residential, a big apartment landlord. He and his wife, Helen, have donated millions to local charities, cultural institutions and politicos (including former Gov. Bruce Rauner) and became major donors to Lori Lightfoot after her mayoral win.



Stephen J. Serio

John Canning

13. JOHN CANNING

Chairman, Madison Dearborn Partners

Canning is a Chicago private-equity pioneer, founding his firm in 1992 and then investing \$23 billion in some 140 companies along the way. He's personally invested in marquee Chicago brands including the Chicago Sun-Times. Canning also serves as co-chairman of the Big Shoulders Fund and as chairman of Northwestern Memorial Hospital, and he formerly held chair posts at the Economic Club of Chicago and the Chicago Community Trust.



Getty Images

Jesse Sharkey

14. JESSE SHARKEY

President, Chicago Teachers Union

The CTU prevailed against the mayor in the 11-day strike in October, winning ground on many of its must-haves, attracting solidarity from national political figures and reshaping bargaining conditions for future contracts. While Sharkey ultimately struck the final deal in a one-on-one with Mayor Lori Lightfoot, even he would admit he couldn't have done it without his second in command, Vice President Stacy Davis Gates. Next up is the union's fight in Springfield for an elected school board.



Moshe Zusman Photography Studio

Penny Pritzker

15. PENNY PRITZKER

Founder and chair, PSP Partners

Pritzker launched her firm in 2012 and has invested billions in real estate, businesses and other fund managers. She parlayed her experience and support for President Barack Obama into an appointment as U.S. secretary of commerce from 2013 to 2017 and is now at the helm of P33, a coalition of business, education and civic leaders pushing to reclaim the “World’s Brightest Spot” moniker granted to Chicago during the 1933 World’s Fair—this time for the city’s tech community.



Stephen J. Serio

Rocky Wirtz

16. ROCKY WIRTZ

President, Wirtz Corp.

The Blackhawks and United Center make up just a fraction of the Wirtz empire. The family business is also in real estate, insurance and video production, but it's dominated by Break-thru Beverage, the nation's third-largest liquor distributor, with more than \$5 billion in annual revenue and 7,000 employees in 13 states, Washington, D.C., and Canada. Likely on the horizon for Wirtz: getting into the sports gambling game with a betting facility at or near the Madhouse on Madison.



HCSC

Maurice Smith

17. MAURICE SMITH

President, Health Care Service Corp.

Smith has climbed HCSC's ladder since starting out there as an intern in 1993. He's been president of Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Illinois and chair of the Dearborn Life Insurance board, an HCSC subsidiary. Smith is also firmly established in Chicago's philanthropic community. He is a potential contender to take over as CEO of HCSC from interim CEO David Lesar after a leadership shakeup and at a time of convulsive change in health care.



Bloomberg

Oscar Munoz

18. OSCAR MUNOZ

CEO, United Airlines

This veteran transportation executive has turned around the nation's second-biggest airline and Chicago's fifth-largest public company since he took over as CEO four years ago. First he won over employees, then investors. His civic connections, his outspokenness on hot topics such as immigration reform and his financial resources mean he will continue to be influential even after he gives up the CEO seat in May to become executive chairman.



WTTW News

Blase Cupich

19. BLASE CUPICH

Cardinal and archbishop, Archdiocese of Chicago

Though the archdiocese faces significant financial troubles, declining school and church enrollment, and continued fallout from the church's sexual abuse scandal, Chicago is still a Catholic town, and Cupich has led the church here since 2014, with influence in political circles and regular trips to Vatican City.



Otis Moss

20. OTIS MOSS III

Senior pastor, Trinity United Church of Christ

Moss, now a decade into leading the roughly 8,000-strong congregation after the exit of controversial pastor Jeremiah Wright, has been cemented as a force who still attracts influential congregants. Besides helping forgive \$5.3 million in medical debt for 6,000 Chicagoans this year, Moss' church is involved in the Imani Village, designed to provide health care, housing, job training and athletic facilities to residents of the Roseland development.



Jeanne Gang

21. JEANNE GANG

Architect, Studio Gang

Gang has gambled on big and small projects, remaking Chicago's skyline in the process—think the Vista and Aqua towers—with designs that are unmistakably hers. As the lead architect on the \$8.5 billion new terminal at O'Hare International Airport—the first woman to head such a project nationally—she'll leave her mark on one of the city's most important economic engines.



Bloomberg

Jesus "Chuy" Garcia

22. JESUS "CHUY" GARCIA

U.S. representative, 4th Congressional District

Despite his 2015 mayoral loss, Garcia is arguably Illinois' most prominent and popular Latino politico. He took on the elder statesman mantle from retired Rep. Luis Gutierrez after decades in the City Council, the state Senate and the Cook County Board. With other senior Latino elected officials under scrutiny, Garcia could be in store for "an unbeatable map for him and whoever's close to him," says one political watcher.



Getty Images

Chance the Rapper

23. CHANCE THE RAPPER

Rapper, singer and activist

Few other Chicago exports represent the city as faithfully as Chance. The rapper has been on the rise since the release of “Coloring Book” in 2013, but he has not fled to one of the coasts. Chance, whose father, Ken Bennett, has run in Chicago’s political circles for decades, made two ultimately unsuccessful but must-watch endorsements in the 2019 mayoral race. He’s had a banner year regardless—getting married, having his second child, releasing a new album and hosting “Saturday Night Live” (again)—while continuing to support Chicago Public Schools (and the CTU).



Alamy

Mary Dillon

24. MARY DILLON

CEO, Ulta

Bolingbrook-based Ulta, which Dillon has led since 2013, is in the midst of growing into a global brand in both the online space and in brick-and-mortar locations. Its 32 million-member loyalty program is twice as big as Starbucks', and the beauty company's stock has soared 251 percent during Dillon's tenure. How she handles the \$6.72 billion business abroad is her next big challenge.



WTTW News

Andrea Zopp

25. ANDREA ZOPP

CEO, World Business Chicago

Zopp is one of only a few prominent political survivors who carried over from Rahm Emanuel to Lori Lightfoot. As one who could move “from the boardroom to a church pew without missing a beat,” as Emanuel put it, she’s tasked with pivoting the city’s economic development arm to extend investment beyond the Loop to Chicago’s neighborhoods.

Inline Play

Source URL: <https://www.chicagobusiness.com/crains-list/most-powerful-chicagoans-now>