

Out of Turn



A Campaign Story

BY CAROLINE O'DONOVAN

“Like loving a woman with a broken nose,
you may well find lovelier lovelies, but never a lovely so real.”

— NELSON ALGREN, *Chicago: City on the Make* (1951)

One month after the March 20, 2012, primary elections in Illinois there is no declared victor in the 39th District contest for state representative. It took days for all the ballots, including absentee and early voters, to be counted, and in the end, the difference separating the incumbent and her challenger was only 125 votes.¹ This tiny margin, well under 5 percent of the eight thousand who voted in the district, qualifies the race for a discovery recount.² There is no telling how long the recount,

1. Nick Moroni, “Guzzardi Wants Recount in Race against ‘Machine’ Candidate Berrios,” Chicago Muckrakers (blog), *Chicago Reporter*, April 9, 2012, <http://www.chicagonow.com/chicago-muckrakers/2012/04/guzzardi-wants-recount-in-race-against-machine-candidate-berrios>.

2. “The loser of an election [in Illinois] who comes within 5 percent of the apparent winner can request a review of ballots. The initiator may only request a recount in up to 25 percent of the precincts and must pay ten dollars per precinct.” “Question of the Month, December 2010,” *The Council of State Governments—Midwest*, accessed July 8, 2015, http://www.csamidwest.org/member_services/Dec10QOM.aspx.

which began almost four weeks to the day after the election, will take.³

Few in Chicago's political scene expected Will Guzzardi, the young Ivy League-educated challenger, to come so close to dislodging Maria Antonia "Toni" Berrios from her seat in Springfield. Many who wrote about the election admitted to believing the young progressive was on a fool's errand. Still, while Guzzardi's team is looking for less than 2 percent of the total votes, it seems unlikely that they will find them.⁴

In many ways, the high profile recount is Guzzardi's first step toward making good on his promise to keep the progressive movement on Chicago's Northwest Side alive until 2014, when he will have the opportunity to take another crack at Berrios.⁵ It is undeniable that Guzzardi and his team summoned an unprecedented level of political excitement in the district, but as Guzzardi's campaign manager, Rebecca Reynolds, told me, the Chicago City Council has had a progressive caucus for eight years, and they have only now begun to make significant inroads into the process; a similarly powerful progressive caucus in the Illinois House is at least ten years away.⁶

3. Carol Felsenthal, "Will Guzzardi on His Plans for the Recount (and After)," *Chicago*, April 10, 2012, <http://www.chicagomag.com/Chicago-Magazine-Felsenthal-Files/April-2012/Will-Guzzardi-on-His-Plans-for-the-Recount-and-After>.

4. Editor's note: Guzzardi conceded in May 2012. Nick Moroni, "Guzzardi Concedes 39th District State Primary Race to Berrios," *Chicago Muckrakers* (blog), *Chicago Reporter*, May 1, 2012, <http://www.chicagonow.com/chicago-muckrakers/2012/05/guzzardi-concedes-39th-district-state-primary-race-to-berrios>.

5. Editor's note: Guzzardi ran and won in 2014. Marcus Riley, "Will Guzzardi Wins 39th District, Bests Berrios," *NBC Chicago*, March 18, 2014, <http://www.nbcchicago.com/blogs/ward-room/AP-Projects-Will-Guzzardi-for-39th-District-250898751.html>.

6. Editor's note: O'Donovan's 2012 thesis elaborates upon two articles she wrote for *Gapers Block*. Quotes are from interviews she conducted in 2011 and 2012 and

Win or lose, the story of Will Guzzardi's freshman political campaign testifies to a shift in the character of the Northwest Side and a shift in the politics of the city. That change is slow, but indisputable; Guzzardi's campaign is just one example of how it got started.

The first thing that everybody seems to notice about Guzzardi is that his hair is well on its way to being almost completely gray. For a candidate for political office a little gray is usually a good thing—it adds an air of distinction. For Guzzardi, who is only twenty-four, it might be especially helpful. In the first year or so that I knew Guzzardi, his graying hair was typically mop-like and matched by a light stubble. He was a Chicago editor for the *Huffington Post*, working long hours from home, writing about city and state politics, or, as his campaign literature reads: “covering local leaders and investigating corruption.” It's not just a line of publicity though. In March of 2011 Guzzardi followed the unfolding story of the Fisk Generating Station, a coal plant so filthy that it left the surrounding neighborhood of Pilsen with the nation's highest asthma rate, according to community activist, Cuahutémoc Morfin.⁷ Danny Solis, the 25th Ward alderman who had received a fifty thousand dollar political contribution from Fisk's owner, had repeatedly refused to

will not be footnoted here. Caroline O'Donovan, “Out of Turn: The Story of the Will Guzzardi Campaign,” *Gapers Block*, March 9, 2012, <http://gapersblock.com/mechanics/2012/03/09/out-of-turn-the-story-of-the-will-guzzardi-campaign>; and Caroline O'Donovan, “Cook County Regular Democratic Disorganization: Guzzardi and Berrios,” *Gapers Block*, March 30, 2012, <http://gapersblock.com/mechanics/2012/03/30/cook-county-regular-democratic-disorganization-guzzardi-and-berrios>.

7. Will Guzzardi, “25th Ward Aldermanic Runoff: Under Pressure from Morfin, Danny Solis Changes Course on Coal Plant,” *Huffington Post*, March 8, 2011, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/03/08/25th-ward-aldermanic-runo_n_832936.html; and Kari Lydersen, “Toxic Neighbor,” *Chicago Reporter*, October 29, 2008, <http://chicagoreporter.com/toxic-neighbor>.

support a Clean Power Ordinance in the City Council that would regulate the plant.⁸ It wasn't until media attention almost lost him reelection in the 2011 aldermanic runoff against Morfin that Solis reversed his position.⁹ The plant was finally closed in August of 2012.¹⁰

It was through another such piece of reporting that Guzzardi eventually came to turn the Buzz Stop Barbershop at Albany and Diversey into his very own campaign headquarters. In the fall of 2010 Guzzardi began covering the political aspirations of a teacher named Jeremy Karpen. Karpen, like Guzzardi, was young and white and, like Guzzardi, was not born in Chicago. He was a member of the Green Party, believed in lower taxes for the middle class and better schools for low-income students, and in November of 2010 would run for state representative in the 39th District. Karpen was the face of the new demographic that has been inching its way into Chicago's northwest neighborhoods ever since Liz Phair was singing about Wicker Park in the early 1990s.¹¹ Being a symbol of gentrification wasn't so much the problem, though, as was the sheer political clout of the woman he was up against.

Enter the competition, Toni Berrios, the incumbent state representative. Berrios was first elected in 2003 and is the first woman of Puerto

8. Edward McClelland, "Clean Power Ordinance To Be Reintroduced," Ward Room (blog), *NBC Chicago*, July 26, 2011, <http://www.nbcchicago.com/blogs/ward-room/Clean-Power-Ordinance-To-Be-Reintroduced-126186918.html>.

9. Ibid.

10. Julie Wernau, "Closure of Chicago's Crawford, Fisk Electric Plants Ends Coal Era," *Chicago Tribune*, August 30, 2012, http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2012-08-30/business/chi-closure-of-chicagos-crawford-fisk-electric-plants-ends-coal-era-20120830_1_fisk-and-crawford-midwest-generation-coal-plants.

11. Jessica Hopper, "Girly Show: The Oral History of Liz Phair's *Exile In Guyville*," *Spin*, June 24, 2013, <http://www.spin.com/2013/06/liz-phair-exile-in-guyville-oral-history-best-1993>.

Rican descent to serve in the house.¹² She was in her fourth term during the race against Karpen and is currently in her fifth term. A variety of factors have made it possible for her to retain this seat. The 39th District was intentionally redrawn in 2000 to create a Latino majority, and Berrios thinks her background makes her the right person for the job: "This district was created for Latinos, I believe it should have Latino representation."¹³ Toni Berrios's dad is Joe Berrios. He was born in the Cabrini-Green Homes and, according to his professional website, got his first job washing dishes at age thirteen.¹⁴ It was around the same time that his real career began. Starting as a teenager, Berrios worked for Alderman Thomas Keane's political organization, learning along the way what it means to be a Democrat in Cook County. By 1976 Keane was in federal prison in Kentucky, having been convicted of mail fraud and conspiracy, and Joe Berrios was a precinct captain. In 1982 Berrios landed his first job as an elected official. Today, he is the Cook County assessor, a commissioner on the Illinois Board of Review, and the chairman of the Cook County Democratic Party.¹⁵

So it's not just Toni Berrios, the thirty-three-year-old former Liquor Control Commission employee, that Jeremy Karpen was up against in the general election in 2010. It wasn't just Berrios loyalists—families who barbecue in Cragin Park every Saturday and go to church every Sunday—that he had to convince. His opponents weren't even limited

12. "Rep. Maria Antonia 'Toni' Berrios," *Illinois House Democrats*, accessed July 7, 2015, <http://www.housedem.state.il.us/members/berriost>.

13. Will Guzzardi, "Jeremy Karpen, Green Party Candidate, Takes On Toni Berrios in 39th District," *Huffington Post*, September 24, 2010, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/09/24/jeremy-karpen-green-party_n_738039.html.

14. "About Joseph Berrios," *Cook County Assessor's Office*, accessed July 7, 2015, <http://www.cookcountyassessor.com/aboutjoeberrios.aspx>.

15. David Bernstein, "A Troubling Assessment of Insider Joseph Berrios," *Better Government Association*, August 30, 2010, http://www.bettergov.org/a_troubling_assessment_of_insider_joseph_berrios.

to the supporters of the Latino Caucus that Berrios cochairs. It was the tax attorneys who want breaks from the Cook County assessor; it was the career politicians who might need votes from the chair of the Cook County Democratic Party; it was anyone who needed a favor in Cook County.

Karpen lost the race for state representative, coming in with about 35 percent of the vote. Forrest Claypool, who challenged Joe Berrios for Cook County assessor, also lost that year.¹⁶ There may have been, as Karpen put it, “an anti-incumbency attitude” that year, but not in Chicago.¹⁷

Guzzardi, who had written every headline from “Green Party Candidate” to “Green against the Machine” in hopes of making a dent, watched as the Democratic machine wore Karpen down. He kept reporting, but he was frustrated, increasingly aware of the entrenched system of political favors that runs Chicago, and no nearer to making it stop. Guzzardi asked Karpen the obvious racial question, how he felt about representing the flow of new money and youth into the neighborhood. There is an unpleasant discord when the young idealist is forced to admit that he’s riding the wave of gentrification to power. Karpen responded: “It sucks. It really sucks.”¹⁸ Guzzardi announced his candidacy for state representative in the summer of 2011.¹⁹

The 39th District of Illinois is comprised of Belmont Cragin, Avondale, Hermosa, and Logan Square. Logan Square, where Guzzardi’s headquarters is located, is the neighborhood furthest to the south. People between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-four make up 29 percent

16. Rich Miller, “The Downstate Blowout and Other Political Oddities,” *Capitol Fax.com*, November 3, 2010, <http://capitolfax.com/wp-mobile.php?p=12443&more=1>.

17. Guzzardi, “Jeremy Karpen, Green Party Candidate.”

18. *Ibid.*

19. Felsenthal, “Will Guzzardi on His Plans.”

of the population, which explains the proliferation of new bars and restaurants, one of which seems to spring up every three months. The Berrios campaign is located in Belmont Cragin, where the population is 78.8 percent Hispanic, as compared to Logan Square's 51.7 percent. Belmont Cragin, where half of inhabitants are under seventeen or over fifty, is where the Berrios family lives.²⁰

Guzzardi was born in New York City. His father is a big-name publisher, his mother a social worker. He attended high school in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and was ultimately accepted to Brown University.²¹ There, Guzzardi developed his interests in jazz, comedy, and writing. He is an excellent pianist. At Brown, Guzzardi also cofounded an online literary magazine, *Wag's Revue*, which has featured the musings of cultural figures from Stephen Colbert to Alison Bechdel.²²

By September 12 Guzzardi had a new haircut. In the crowded back room of Cole's bar on Milwaukee Avenue, his six-foot frame filled the small stage normally reserved for local indie rock bands. Guzzardi took a posture familiar to tall people—the slightly crouched stance of a batter, ready to reach others squarely in their strike zone. Over the heads of close friends, campaign volunteers, and two or three community members, Guzzardi, in a red tie, pressed shirt, and fresh cut became a candidate: "My name is Will Guzzardi, and I'm running to be your next state representative from the 39th District of Illinois!" The room cheered.

"We usually say he moved here after college," says Campaign Manager Reynolds, driving Guzzardi back to headquarters in Logan Square,

20. Editor's note: Statistics in this paragraph were from the Metro Chicago Information Center. The MCIC, a branch of the Commercial Club of Chicago, closed in 2012 and these statistics are no longer available online.

21. Felsenthal, "Will Guzzardi on His Plans."

22. Rob Hochschild, "For Writers Who Are Going To Do Big Things," *The Review Review*, no date, <http://www.thereviewreview.net/interviews/writers-who-are-going-do-big-things>.

“but if they push it, Will’s lived here for two years.” Long before he ordered campaign stickers or booked the kickoff party, Guzzardi hired Reynolds, whose previous experience included working for Morfin when he ran against Solis; before that, she had worked for Karpen when he ran against Toni Berrios. “When Will told me he wanted to run,” Reynolds said one day at campaign headquarters, “my first thought was absolutely not! He was just one of the best journalists.”

In what was the Buzz Cut Barbershop the sole remnants of the former occupants are some tissue for lining collars and a bit of window paint on the front door reading, “Walk-Ins Welcome.” When the campaign moved into the space they washed away the rest of the paint, but Guzzardi spared that message, finding it particularly apt. Lists of voter addresses and postcards with Guzzardi’s face on them cover the tables, and volunteer sign-up charts drawn on whiteboards cover the walls. Behind the front room is an office, with comfier chairs, printers, and seemingly infinite used coffee cups. This office has a separate bathroom, whose sink is crowded with razor blades, shaving cream, toothpaste, and deodorant. Extra-large dress shirts on hangers are strung up along the windows. On the coffee table there is a printout of a *New Yorker* story, “How David Beats Goliath: When Underdogs Break the Rules.”

Reynolds is a loud-talking, numbers-spewing, volunteer-herding campaign manager. She is an idealist, but a hard-nosed one; she learned everything she knows about campaigns from reading, networking, attending conferences, and learning on the job. She knows the best time of day to send out e-mails (just after lunch, just before people leave work), the correct number of times to confirm a voter’s support (two), and how much you can expect to get from a major donor on the second donation (about three quarters of the original amount). It is notable to add that for all the *Reader’s* Ben Joravsky finds Chicagoans mind-numbingly complacent and their elected leaders an embarrassment to the nation, he once said to me of Reynolds, “I love that girl.”

While most people barely survive the brutal campaign schedule, it’s Reynolds’s preferred working condition. She is disdainful of other

campaign workers, though, and says that in Chicago, “there just isn’t an existing grassroots organizational structure.” Those who were trained in machine campaigns don’t understand the value of work, only the value of showing up—much like the machine candidates themselves—and there is a running joke among organizers about staffers who worked for the Obama campaign in 2008: “They think they know how to recruit, but the voters came to them. This is way harder.”

No matter how many times Reynolds reads the elevator pitch her level tone and optimism are never shaken. “I’m supporting Will because I believe we need independent leaders who will be accountable only to us, and not to big money and special interests,” Reynolds says slowly and clearly. “Now you say it.” Even in the face of grouchy constituents with their hair in rollers and kids screaming in the kitchen, Reynolds says every word slowly and with a smile. She wrote the pitch and she also tested it. A few months in, regular volunteers saw a change in the script. Reynolds had noticed that not all the constituents knew who the incumbent was, so she added another clause: “she’s the daughter of Joe Berrios.”

It was around the time that Guzzardi hired Reynolds that he contacted Representative Berrios and let her know he was running. Her response was polite, and then for months, the Guzzardi campaign didn’t hear from her. Guzzardi, who runs into her occasionally at candidates’ forums and other events, describes her as “confused,” and one can imagine why. There is little reason to believe that Berrios has any idea what is going on in her own campaign. In Springfield, Berrios is active on women’s issues, chairs the Consumer Protection Committee, sits on the Executive Committee, and is cochair of the Illinois Legislative Latino Caucus. She spearheaded an educational program that raises private funds to send undocumented students to college and sponsored a free community health fair aimed at helping women.²³ On weekends, she

23. “About Toni” and “State Rep. Berrios to Chair Consumer Protection Committee,” *Maria Antonia “Toni” Berrios, Illinois State Representative, 39th District*, accessed July 8, 2015, <http://toniberrios.com/about-toni>.

sometimes sits at a booth at the Logan Square Farmers Market fielding questions and concerns from residents. In her own words, "I've been a very good state representative."²⁴

Backed by her father's political clout, the campaign is outside of Toni Berrios's jurisdiction.²⁵ In January of 2004 Joe Berrios openly admitted to pushing Pedro DeJesus out of the race against his daughter. When asked why he had stopped supporting a candidate in another race after the opponent (Willie Delgado) endorsed his daughter's campaign, Berrios told the *Reader*, "After that I felt I had a commitment to help Willie, 'cause he was helping Toni. So when [Jose] Alvarez came to me for help I said, 'Not this time'... In the last election I believe I gave him \$70,000. So you can understand why he changed his mind about running."²⁶ In May of 2011 the *Chicago Sun-Times* reported that Joe Berrios had given one of his children a ten thousand dollar annual raise, even as other employees in the assessor's office were dealt a mandatory twelve-day furlough. He was simultaneously accused of lobbying in Springfield for legislation sponsored by his daughter.²⁷ Said Berrios of her father's protectiveness: "He's my father—he's there to help his daughter."²⁸ When you've got one million dollars in campaign funds,²⁹ what's ten thousand dollars between family?

In February of 2012 someone placed an ad in the *Chicago Sun-Times* that read, "Happy V-day Uncle Joe, Thank you for the jobs and

24. Ben Joravsky, "A Father's Love," *Reader*, January 29, 2004, <http://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/a-fathers-love/Content?oid=914444>.

25. *Ibid.*

26. *Ibid.*

27. "Berrios' Family Ties that Bind—Even at the Capitol," *Illinois Review*, May 24, 2011, <http://illinoisreview.typepad.com/illinoisreview/2011/05/berrioslobbying-efforts-continue.html#more>.

28. Joravsky, "A Father's Love."

29. *Ibid.*

promotions. We couldn't have gotten them without you. With love, the Berrios family." Alonso Zaragoza, who is running against Joe Berrios for Democratic committeeman in the 31st Ward, took the credit for the ad, and political junkies from Lake Michigan to Cicero had a laugh.³⁰ It probably won't prevent Zaragoza from getting crushed in the election, though, just as full knowledge of the misdeeds of establishment candidates hasn't prevented anyone from winning an election in Chicago from the city's inception.

This is what Chicagoans proudly refer to as the Chicago machine. It's a label that's used almost recklessly. A thing of lore it may be, but glamorous it is not—being a machine politician involves a lot of standing in line and waiting your turn. Last fall, Appellate Justice Rudy Garcia accused Berrios of yanking his Democratic Party endorsement. Garcia says Berrios did it because seven years ago Garcia refused to throw a case for him, despite the fact that word came down that Berrios wanted to see it go a certain way. Berrios says Garcia lost the nomination because "Rudy didn't work. He called one committeeman. If he'd have gotten off his fat ass, he could have gotten it."³¹ He's a funny man, but Joe Berrios seems genuinely unaware that handshaking, phone calling, and ass kissing are not actually the primary work of an appellate court justice. In Berrios's mind, that's the most important work a politician does. It took him over forty years to masterfully manipulate the insidious network of favors that permeates Chicago's daily grind; he began as a precinct captain much like a drug lord begins as a lookout. For the Berrios family, it's just another iteration of the American dream in which hard work is compensated by wealth and security.

30. Samantha Abernethy, "Joe Berrios Has a Funny Valentine," *Chicagoist*, February 15, 2012, http://chicagoist.com/2012/02/15/joe_berrios_has_a_funny_valentine.php.

31. Abdon Pallasch, "Berrios Denies Election 'Payback' after Judge Rules against Daughter," *Chicago Sun-Times*, November 22, 2011.

“Chicago ain’t ready for reform!” “Don’t make no waves, don’t back no losers.” “*Ubi Est Mea?* (Where’s mine?)” Writers find it almost impossible to talk about Chicago without throwing in at least one or two of these well-worn epitaphs. Early in the Progressive Era scholars and journalists believed that political machines were both immoral and detrimental to the community.³² They pointed to connections with bribery, intimidation, and fraud, not to mention extortion, murder, and Al Capone. Urban historians are quick to point out that Chicago didn’t invent the political machine. New York had the first, then later San Francisco and Boston. Philadelphia had a machine by Republicans. All it takes is an economically depressed, heavily immigrant underclass and an opportunistic, resource-rich political class, and a machine will form naturally.³³ For the most part, voters don’t care what their elected officials do, as long as they feel like they got something out of voting for them, even if it’s just a ham on Election Day. While other cities gradually learned to expect more out of their government, Chicagoans have retained much lower expectations.

Indeed, the persistent, quiet whirring of the machine has always relied entirely on the smallest of its cogwheels.³⁴ When Berrios defeated Karpen in 2010, according to the *Reader*, it was in large part because individual precinct captains rooted out voters before they went to the polls and told them that Karpen was running with the Tea Party—not

32. M. Ostrogorski, *Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties*, trans. Frederick Clarke, 2 vols. (London and New York: Macmillan, 1902); William T. Stead, *If Christ Came to Chicago* (Chicago: Laird & Lee, 1894).

33. Steven P. Erie, *Rainbow’s End: Irish-Americans and the Dilemmas of Urban Machine Politics, 1840–1985* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

34. Sonya Forthal, *Cogwheels of Democracy: A Study of the Precinct Captain* (New York: William-Frederick Press, 1946).

the Green Party.³⁵ While Toni and Joe Berrios might not have made much noise about Guzzardi getting on the ballot, elements of the Cook County Democratic Party were being put into play to mobilize voters for her even before Guzzardi's ballot petitions were counted. "Your precinct captain is around if you need a light bulb changed, or snow shoveled, or your mail picked up," Guzzardi explained to friends one night after an evening of door knocking. "He does for you." Then, come election time, he'll come by with a piece of paper with some names written on it, and those are the guys you vote for. Whether appointed or elected, they are the eyes and ears of the party organization—in this case, the one that's controlled by Chairman Berrios.³⁶

Mike Planthaber lives on west Barry Avenue in Belmont Cragin. He's recently retired from the CTA, and his wife, Lois, makes fifty-eight thousand dollars a year working as an assistant to the 30th Ward. Between 1999 and 2004, they made twelve donations between sixty and three hundred dollars to then alderman, Mike Wojcik, and after that, multiple donations to his replacement, Ariel Reboyras. But Planthaber is more than just a loyal supporter and small-dollar donor. He's the neighborhood precinct captain.

35. Kari Lydersen, "The Silver Lining Party," *Reader*, November 18, 2010, <http://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/illinois-green-party-rich-whitney-2010-election-losses/Content?oid=2736917>.

36. Editor's note: In Cook County party ward committeemen appoint precinct captains; in other Illinois counties captains are called precinct committeemen and are elected by voters. All are volunteers. Zohar Lechtman, "Gendering Chicago Politics: Institutionalization of Women in Positions of Power," PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2008, 233–234, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/304436616>; and John Schmeltzer, "Small-stakes Races: Precinct Elections," *Chicago Tribune*, March 16, 1986, http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1986-03-16/news/8601190617_1_precinct-captains-precinct-committeemen-precinct-committeeman.

With the rise of computer technology, some predicted that the precinct captain would become obsolete.³⁷ Where it used to be all about doing favors for the parish priest or passing out garbage can lids before elections now it's "all talk of 'standardization of response' and 'spreadsheet data bases.'"³⁸ The rise of the grassroots campaign movement supposedly confirmed the death of the precinct captain, what with Twitter and Facebook helping organizers set up events and get donations instantly. What none of this explains, however, is what Mike Planthaber was doing following Will Guzzardi around the streets of the 39th District. In the course of campaigning, Guzzardi ran into Planthaber a few times. Once, as he was talking to voters, Planthaber followed him from door to door. As soon as Guzzardi walked away, Planthaber was up the stairs and knocking on the exact same doors, presumably telling the people inside not to vote for him. Another time, Guzzardi turned around to see Planthaber flashing a thumbs-down and frowning at the constituent as if to say, "not this guy." Campaigning calls for pure optimism, so Guzzardi and Reynolds laughed these instances off. The only reason to work tireless hours and spend thousands of your own dollars is because you believe you are going to win. Still, it's hard not to be a little perturbed, especially in the face of voters who say, "sounds good, buddy, but I'll have to ask Mike."

Reynolds's mantra is that if ten thousand people are going to vote, then you only have to shake five thousand and one hands to win. When talking to a voter volunteers had to score their response. A one is a definite yes, a two is a probably yes, and a three is a maybe. Fours and fives don't

37. Editor's note: Although McKenna & Han's study appeared in 2014 it summarizes the technological changes in campaigning outlined by O'Donovan in 2012. Elizabeth McKenna and Hahrie Han, *Groundbreakers: How Obama's 2.2 Million Volunteers Transformed Campaigning in America* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 26–30.

38. Bill Granger, "Precinct Captain a Dying Breed," *Chicago Tribune*, January 30, 1985, http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1985-01-30/news/8501060524_1_jane-byrne-precinct-captain-mayor-washington.

count. After months of keeping such tallies, though, Guzzardi came up with a new response code: ABB, or Anybody but Berrios. There were lots of ABBs on the campaign trail, from tired working moms who have petitioned regularly for changes they never see to the politically savvy voters who have long been trying to oust Berrios as a machine candidate. Guzzardi speaks encouragingly of the number of constituents who invited him into their homes, listened to his platform, and then guaranteed their vote. One of these was Tony, a middle-aged press machinist for the *Chicago Tribune* with nine grandkids. If property taxes keep rising, Tony told Guzzardi, he and his wife would be forced to move to Indiana. Tony asked Guzzardi how old he was, and I expected him to laugh when Guzzardi answered, "twenty-four." Instead he said, "you wouldn't know it, with all that gray hair. That's good though. Get some young faces in there." When Guzzardi asked if he could count on Tony's vote in the primary in March, Tony said yes, for him and for his wife. "It just goes to show you that the whole age line of attack just doesn't work," Guzzardi whispered as he rung the next doorbell.

Just a few days before the Berrios campaign had done some "message testing," a mass-marketing tactic to find out what kind of negative ads about Guzzardi might stick. Apparently, exhaustive research had uncovered that one of Guzzardi's donor had briefly worked for a consulting firm with ties to the Libyan government. The connection Berrios tried to draw between Guzzardi and Muammar Gaddafi earned scoffs from campaign staff and constituents alike. Needless to say, Guzzardi himself never had the opportunity to speak with the murderous dictator before his death in 2011. The attack did not poll well.

The message that did poll well led to an attack mailer, which accused Guzzardi of being allied with Wall Street and big business because he took donations from law firms that support off-shore tax havens. Untrue, of course, but, as Reynolds says, there are six elements to strong messaging, and believability is the most important one. With the majority of Guzzardi's funding coming from out of the state, coupled with his Ivy League background, a mailer that pictures him with, through the magic

of Photoshop, an older white man and a limousine is fairly believable to many people in the 39th District.

About thirty days before the election I stopped by the Buzz Stop to find something rather unusual: a political candidate toggling back and forth between an Excel spreadsheet and a neighborhood map, mumbling something incomprehensible about precinct-captain assignments. Reynolds, it turns out, was working a much-needed day from home, gathering her strength for the coming deluge. Walking the precincts with Guzzardi that afternoon, though, it was impressive to see how quickly, after months of silence, the Berrios campaign had blanketed the streets with Toni's face. The cynic can't help but wonder what Guzzardi would do even if he won the election. Berrios is accountable to special interests and corporations, like many in Springfield.³⁹ The truth is that Guzzardi's single vote against the nation's most regressive income tax won't change it; it will just reduce his ability to sponsor other legislation as other representatives become increasingly wary of him.

In January of 2012 Alderman Scott Waguespack, who was elected on a platform of vehement opposition to the privatization of city resources, endorsed Guzzardi's bid. Winning Waguespack's endorsement was a major coup for Guzzardi, who undoubtedly would like to model himself in Waguespack's image as a reformer. The problem is, of course, trying to figure out what Waguespack has actually reformed. The City Council, including Waguespack, passed Rahm Emanuel's budget without debate, despite significant public consternation over cuts to mental health facilities,⁴⁰ and in January Mayor Emanuel managed to give himself sole control over the selection of contractors for the G8 and NATO

39. Moroni, "Guzzardi Concedes 39th District."

40. Hal Dardick and John Byrne, "Emanuel's Budget Unanimously Approved," *Chicago Tribune*, November 16, 2011, http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2011-11-16/news/chi-emanuel-budget-expected-to-pass-easily-today-20111116_1_city-mental-health-clinics-mayor-rahm-emanuel-aldermen.

conventions, again with the council's blessing.⁴¹ Many in the city's political circles feel abandoned by the reform candidates who run on progressive platforms, score unthinkable victories, and then immediately begin to play by inside rules. Would the same thing happen to Guzzardi? Guzzardi's argument is that having no friends in corrupt circles will mean that he actually has to do what is best for the voter. Still, reformers tend to be more potent as symbols than as actual legislators. It's not easy to make change from the outside.

Jim Reed of the Illinois Education Association, which endorsed Guzzardi in late February, said he has long enjoyed a pleasant working relationship with Representative Berrios, but said that being tied up with the leadership can make it hard to act unilaterally even on policy issues that are important to you. Reed said the IEA made it clear to Berrios that school vouchers are a detriment to public education, but caught up in an alliance to various caucuses and the Executive Committee, she sponsored the legislation anyway. The local organizations who chose to endorse Guzzardi, Reed said, believed that a new approach—a fresh face—might make all the difference. The *Chicago Tribune*, which endorsed Guzzardi in early March despite “disagree[ing] with him on many things,” apparently felt the same way.⁴² What sustains people like Guzzardi and Reynolds, though, is the idea that if progressives could just get a little more attention, a little more acclaim, stir up just a little more excitement than lazy, uninformed, and apathetic voters would be excited enough to make a change. The more people vote, the less likely incumbents are to get a free pass.

41. Kristen Mack and Hal Dardick, “Emanuel Gets Protest Curbs, Spending Power,” *Chicago Tribune*, January 18, 2012, http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2012-01-18/news/ct-met-city-council-g8-nato-0119-20120119_1_protest-curbs-g-8and-nato-mayor-rahm-emanuel.

42. “For the Illinois House,” *Chicago Tribune*, March 8, 2012, http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2012-03-08/opinion/ct-edit-house2-20120308_1_state-auditor-chicago-police-officer-pension.

Dan Walker, a former Illinois governor, began his political career walking the precincts of Chicago. He ended it in prison, although shockingly, not on charges of corruption, but for bank fraud.⁴³ In his autobiography, Walker writes of his introduction to the political machine, how at first trading baskets of vegetables for votes and giving homeless people false voter-registration cards along with bottles of champagne felt wrong. Even as he worried about the ethical aspect of the system, Walker appreciated that “there was an immediacy, a directness, a simple justice to it—a favor for a vote... It was what it was and didn’t pretend to be anything more.”⁴⁴

Walker became a part of that system as an adult; Toni Berrios was born into it. So when she says, “I’ve been a very good state representative,” she means it. She’s shaken the right hands, made the right friends, maintained the right connections, and voted how she was told to vote. “She’s not evil,” Guzzardi said at a policy meeting, “but Toni is not accountable to voters. We are not the people who put her in office.” The problem with Berrios is that she has no reason, no impetus, to do more work than voters expect of her. Rey Colón, alderman of the city’s 35th Ward, which partially overlaps with the 35th District, says, “most people just don’t know what [state representatives] do or how their votes in Springfield impact their daily lives back home.”⁴⁵ In *Machine Politics in Transition*, Thomas Guterbock writes of patronage politicians: “Many of their day-to-day political actions are selfishly motivated... As part of a

43. William B. Crawford Jr. and Mitchell Lochin, “Ex-gov. Walker Admits Bank Fraud,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 6, 1987, http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1987-08-06/news/8702270503_1_first-american-savings-federal-charges-plea-agreement.

44. Dan Walker, *The Maverick and the Machine: Governor Dan Walker Tells His Story* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2007), 36.

45. Brienne Callahan, “The Greening of Logan Square: Campaigning for Change in Logan Square,” *Gapers Block*, August 18, 2008, http://gapersblock.com/detour/campaigning_for_change_in_logan_square.

powerful and secretive party, they enjoy a freedom to act selfishly, which politicians in other settings do not share.”⁴⁶

Over fifty years ago, on the opposite side of the city, another young intellectual fought a similar battle. Leon Despres spoke five languages and was a practicing lawyer in Hyde Park when he became an alderman in 1955. Although he was white, as a reformer, Despres earned the moniker of “the lone Negro on the City Council” in an age when even African American aldermen were rubber-stamping Mayor Daley’s pro-segregation housing policies.⁴⁷ Like Guzzardi, Despres rode his bike to and from the office, prompting Chicago journalist, Mike Royko, to question if Despres was really an alderman after all, seeing as he didn’t own a Cadillac.⁴⁸ Despres made destroying kickbacks, like driveway permits that businesses had to purchase at staggering costs from aldermen, and fighting against political patronage his mission.⁴⁹ Kenan Heise, who spent thirty-six years at the *Chicago Tribune* during the first Daley administration, said of Despres: “In a city government run on clout and patronage, he had neither.”⁵⁰

Guzzardi, too, has neither clout nor patronage, but the dream, as hard as it is to imagine, of a city that requires neither. It’s hard to imagine because the machine is engrained in the city’s identity, passed down from generation to generation, from Daley to Daley, from father to daughter.

46. Thomas M. Guterbock, *Machine Politics in Transition: Party and Community in Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

47. Jodi Wilgoren, “Age 97, and Still at War with the Old Daley Machine,” *New York Times*, May 31, 2005, <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/31/us/age-97-and-still-at-war-with-the-old-daley-machine.html>.

48. Mike Royko, forward to *Challenging the Daley Machine: A Chicago Alderman’s Memoir*, by Leon M. Despres, with the assistance of Kenan Heise (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2005), ix.

49. Leon M. Despres, *Challenging the Daley Machine*, 34–35, 58–64.

50. Kenan Heise, preface to *Challenging the Daley Machine*, xi–xii.

The voters who perpetuate it, the journalists who write about it, and the committeemen who depend upon it have lived in this Chicago so long that they can't imagine that there's another way. Despres, though, saw another way: "I fell in love with a city as some do a sport or the theater or even a writer."⁵¹ Politics in Chicago may breed cynics, but it's the lovers, especially the blind ones, that will change it.

Before I even arrived at Guzzardi headquarters on Election Day, a Berrios campaign worker standing outside the Logan Square Blue Line stop had already handed me a palm card with her name at the top. Vote Berrios signs were clustered together in groups of five or six, often surrounded by one or two Guzzardi signs, and occasionally, some Save our Boulevards signs put up by the Logan Square Neighborhood Association.

The precinct captains, who had been preparing for Election Day for weeks, arrived at headquarters at 5:30 a.m. A box of Dunkin' Donuts, a campaign staple for liberals and conservatives, incumbents and challengers alike, was already waiting. Their sole goal was to find all the voters who had said they would support Guzzardi for state representative and ensure that they went to the polls.

By the time Guzzardi gave his speech that night most precinct captains were too tired to be nervous about the results. When he started speaking, with 90 percent of the votes counted, the results were too close to call. As Guzzardi thanked his family, a man in camouflage shirt hoisting a Will Guzzardi Democrat sign shouted, "seventy-two votes," the number separating Berrios and Guzzardi. When the votes were finally tallied weeks later Guzzardi was trailing Berrios by 125 votes.⁵² The news media that had been reluctant to cover the story of yet another wide-eyed young reformer was suddenly aflutter with the news that the twenty-four-year-old journalist from out of state had nearly defeated the

51. Despres, *Challenging the Daley Machine*, 5.

52. Moroni, "Guzzardi Wants Recount."

Berrios machine. Mick Dumke of the *Reader* disparaged his ability to predict election results, joking that it wasn't long ago that he told Guzzardi, "he was gonna get his ass kicked."⁵³

The real drama of the day, however, had less to do with who won and who lost than with the person-to-person interactions taking place on the ground between campaign volunteers and the election judges hired by the Board of Elections Commissioners to manage polling stations and tally votes. As stories trickled in of precincts in which election judges refused to supply voter lists to precinct captains and others in which tally machines were accidentally turned off before the results were printed, suspicions about the accuracy of the results were raised. The following day, rumors that the last unreported precinct was in Joe Berrios's ward made the situation even worse. Having lost by less than 5 percent of the vote and with significant suspicion of mismanagement, the Guzzardi campaign decided to file a recount and investigate the day's events.⁵⁴

Long before March 20 arrived, each precinct was split into smaller chunks of turf. Martine Moore, a precinct captain, actress, and former bookseller, covered the blocks bounded east to west by Kedzie and Kimball and north to south by Wrightwood and Belden. On Election Day she was joined by Elly Green, a dancer. In the early hours of the morning, as Logan Square residents were heading to the Blue Line, the team began searching for voters. Cheerfully they knocked on doors, talking to residents who assured them they would vote that afternoon and leaving reminders for those who weren't at home. On the sidewalks, they bumped

53. Mick Dumke, "The Voters Strike Again," the Bleader (blog), *Reader*, March 21, 2012, <http://www.chicagoreader.com/Bleader/archives/2012/03/21/the-voters-strike-again>.

54. Nick Moroni, "Details of Voting 'Irregularities' Surface in Guzzardi, Berrios Saga," Chicago Muckrakers (blog), *Chicago Reporter*, April 27, 2012, <http://www.chicagonow.com/chicago-muckrakers/2012/04/details-of-voting-irregularities-surface-in-guzzardi-berrios-saga>.

into Berrios's precinct captains, wearing red Unite Here! T-shirts, symbolizing their candidate's alliance with the hotel workers' union. By the end of the day Berrios's blue door hangers and Guzzardi's green door hangers would be stacked four deep on some neighborhood doorknobs and scattered liberally across vestibule floors.

After every door had been knocked, precinct captains would momentarily switch hats and become poll watchers. Diane Back, Guzzardi's Election Day coordinator, had tried to prepare the volunteers for this responsibility. The poll watcher should simply approach the election judge and request a list of names of individuals who had voted, copy the information down, and then start knocking on the same doors all over again.⁵⁵ For every supporter who voted, they got to cross one name off the list and move one name closer to victory. So when Martine Moore entered the Christopher House polling location at Altgeld and Sawyer, with her campaign materials tucked away and her Guzzardi sticker out of sight, she expected to be in and out. Instead, she was greeted by a young woman wearing headphones and staring at the floor and another woman who, upon being asked for the list of voters, responded by asking where that list would be. When Moore pointed out that, as the election judge, she should have the list, the election judge responded, "I have no idea what I'm doing. I received no training."

A Guzzardi supporter who votes at the Christopher House polling location told me that she had to wait half an hour to vote that morning. When she had pointed out to the election judge that the poll was supposed to have opened at six, the judge responded, "we're setting up." The supporter asked her, "what if I had somewhere to be? That's disenfranchisement. You're disenfranchising me." She told me this as we watched the same election judge yell at a passerby on a street corner across from the polling place where she was supposed to be working.

55. "All About Poll Watchers: Rights & Responsibilities," *Chicago Board of Election Commissioners*, accessed July 9, 2015, <http://www.chicagoelections.com/en/serving-as-a-poll-watcher.html>.

By the time Moore got the data she was after and went to collect her copcaptain at the polling station at Fullerton and Kedzie, Elly Green was in tears. Increasingly frustrated by Green's presence and apparently confused by the insistence of both Berrios and Guzzardi poll watchers regarding their right to the voter lists, a judge called in the Board of Election inspectors and officials from the State's Attorney's office. Roundly refusing to speak to anyone on the phone or to consult the election-law book, the three men repeatedly told Green that she could not have the voter data. One, a Board of Elections supervisor, told Green that her behavior had put her at risk of being arrested and charged with a misdemeanor.

At the end of the day, at the polling location where Green was nearly arrested, one of the election judges unplugged the machine before the receipt printed, and the results were temporarily lost. After an hour of waiting, all of the poll watchers left empty handed. At the Altgeld and Sawyer polling location, Moore waited for three hours for the tape of results because the election judges had somehow lost the key to the cabinet that held all of the tallying materials. While they searched one election judge said, "can I go home now?" When I asked Moore whether, after twelve hours of canvassing, she had won or lost her precinct, she said, "I don't know. I couldn't even look." The Berrios campaign worker who was assigned to the same polling place said on her way out, "I'm never, ever, ever canvassing for anyone ever again."

An Election Day is supposed to get people excited about democracy. The core team of the Guzzardi campaign had thought about nothing but March 20 for months, and the precinct captains that volunteered for him had been through multiple training sessions with experienced campaign workers. The Board of Election judges on hand could not even be bothered to account for the law.

Throughout their many hours of knocking on doors, volunteers on both sides found themselves asking: where does the Board of Election get these election judges? Judges are required only to pass a test on basic

reading and math skills and election law.⁵⁶ The Cook County Democratic Party and Republican Party chairmen each then provides lists of those eligible to the Cook County Board of Commissioners from which a precinct's judges are selected.⁵⁷ So, in other words, the Cook County Democratic Party, of which Joe Berrios is the head, has the power to provide the names of fully half of the people who will be selected to work the polls in every district, including the one where Berrios's own daughter is running for state representative.

The selection system has a sheen of fairness: each polling place must be staffed by at least one Republican and one Democrat,⁵⁸ but in a place like Chicago, which is overwhelmingly Democratic, there will always be contentious primary races in which the winner of the Democratic primary is the de facto winner the general election. It is worth questioning, then, whether allowing one of the most powerful Democrats in the state to select the individuals operating the polls is an ethical or democratic method of operation.

Sharon Meroni is the executive director of Defend the Vote, an independent watchdog organization that conducted a comprehensive audit of the Illinois State Board of Election's process on Election Day in 2011. The state board is technically required to audit 5 percent of its election materials annually, but Meroni says that these audits never include early or absentee voting and that, regardless, around 90 percent

56. "Become a Judge of Election," *Chicago Board of Election Commissioners*, accessed July 9, 2015, <http://www.chicagoelections.com/en/serving-as-a-judge-of-election.html>.

57. "Election Judges: Duties and Responsibilities, 10 ILCS 5/12, 4/14," *Illinois State Board of Elections*, June 10, 2015, <http://www.elections.il.gov/downloads/electioninformation/pdf/electionjudges.pdf>.

58. *Ibid.*

of all precincts will see some kind of protocol error on Election Day.⁵⁹ None of this information is made accessible to the public, however, and Meroni blogs about how difficult it can be to reach any authorities who in theory are responsible for ensuring a fair and accurate election.

The majority of states require election results this close to be automatically recounted. In Illinois, however, there is no such law. Guzzardi's discovery recount began April 19. He and his team selected one quarter of the precincts in the 39th District to recount—at ten dollars a pop—in hopes of establishing sufficient evidence of inaccuracy or wrong doing.⁶⁰ It seems improbable, but not impossible, that the results will change. Whether his victory comes now or later, the work of building excitement for progressive, independent politics is done. Between this election and the next one, however, it might be wise for those excited by candidates like Guzzardi to work on improving the electoral process, particularly as it takes place on the actual Election Day.

Berrios has issued no statement regarding the results, nor in fact has she spoken to the press about the election at any point since Guzzardi declared his candidacy. According to a *Chicago* magazine interview with Guzzardi, she never even returned his election-night phone call.⁶¹ One imagines, though, that somewhere in Belmont Cragin, heads are bowed, nervously wondering how to reverse a trajectory that suggests a changing face of politics on the Northwest Side.

59. Sharon Meroni, "Vulnerability Assessment and Security Audit of Election Day Polling Place Procedures for the April 5, 2011 Municipal Elections in Chicago, Illinois," *Defend the Vote*, October 26, 2011, <http://www.defendthevote.com/140-news/published/148-published>.

60. Felsenthal, "Will Guzzardi on His Plans"; "Question of the Month."

61. Felsenthal, "Will Guzzardi on His Plans."

The Berrios family may soon take a stab at rebranding by publically joining with Mayor Emanuel in labeling themselves “progressives.”⁶² Emanuel is known to be a master of media manipulation, but there is something inherently unnatural about old-school Chicago politicians trying to be something they’re not for the sake of reputation. Faux reform violates Alex Kotlowitz’s idea of Chicagoans as “people getting by, people with nothing to hide.”⁶³ At least, as Governor Dan Walker would have said, trading a ham or a bottle of champagne for a vote is straightforward.

62. Editor’s note: In retrospect at least one political reporter did think that Berrios’s narrow win over Guzzardi led her to vote more progressively. Ben Joravsky, “Has Challenger Will Guzzardi Made Northwest-Side State Rep Toni Berrios More Progressive?” *Reader*, February 27, 2014, <http://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/candidate-pushes-representative-left-39th-district-campaign/Content?oid=12620767>.

63. Alex Kotlowitz, *Never a City So Real: A Walk in Chicago* (New York: Crown Journeys, 2004), 113.

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