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**Battle is far from over;**

**Takeover vote doesn't begin to determine airport's future**

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SPRINGFIELD-Republicans may have posted big legislative wins in the battle for control of Meigs Field, but Gov. Edgar is still far from being able to christen the first flight out of a reborn lakefront airport.

The Illinois House and Senate, acting on Edgar's order, moved last week to seize Meigs from the city by invoking a World War II-era state law that gives the state Transportation Department authority to own and operate airports.

Edgar's legislative handiwork, however, represented a short-term solution aimed at insulating the state from the Illinois Appellate Court, which as soon as Dec. 16 could lift an injunction preventing Mayor Daley from demolishing Meigs to build a $ 27.2 million park.

Should the city lose in the appeals court, a long legal battle to contest the swift legislative votes is certain, perhaps tying up the dispute for months if not years -- prompting the mayor and his allies to liken last week's developments to the middle of a prize fight.

One of the broad issues in a protracted legal fight against the legislation would be home-rule authority and whether the state could take land paid for with municipal tax revenues.

"As Mayor Daley said, this is a 15-round bout," Park District Supt. Forrest Claypool said. "We're just in the fourth or fifth round now."

Edgar has tried to persuade Daley to embrace a plan presented Friday by the Civic Committee of the Commercial Club of Chicago to make parts of the island a park while preserving Meigs. But Daley has flatly rejected the proposal.

"I'm disappointed he'd want to keep this in the courts for years and years," Edgar said of possible legal attacks by Daley. "I'd hoped this could be resolved very quickly. That's his decision if he's going to take us to court and draw it out."

If the appeals court rules against Edgar's challenge to closing Meigs, as a Cook County judge did, the new legislation would strengthen the governor's case for persuading the state Supreme Court, on appeal, to keep the demolition injunction in place until early January.

Then, Edgar has hinted, Republicans may return in their final two days of complete control of the General Assembly -- Jan. 6 and 7 -- to pass new takeover legislation that would take effect immediately. Because of provisions in the state Constitution, the takeover bill passed last week wouldn't become effective until next June.

Yet another wild card in the dispute is the likely ascension of Daley's brother Bill Daley to President Clinton's Cabinet. Edgar doubts the state's fortunes on the Meigs question will change much if Bill Daley becomes transportation secretary.

"I'm sure he's not going to do anything that will upset his brother, but I haven't seen anything the current secretary of transportation has done that would upset the mayor," Edgar said.

While long legal battles likely lie ahead, a more immediate concern is whether the spat between Edgar and Daley might poison the Legislature, which has school-funding reform, a Chicago Bears stadium and utility deregulation on its agenda.

"Will there be gridlock? There could be, but it won't be because of Meigs," Edgar said.

Incoming House Speaker Michael Madigan (D-Chicago) and Senate President James "Pate" Philip (R-Wood Dale) said state lawmakers could duck the fight because few legislators share Edgar's and Daley's fervor over Meigs.

But other legislators worry that a continually simmering Daley-Edgar spat could set the tone for the Legislature in the next two years.

"Legislators aren't mad at each other. They understand we were all used as pawns in a chess match between two spoiled brats who haven't looked at the effect this is going to have -- and who give a damn less about it," said state Sen. Denny Jacobs (D-East Moline).