

ILLINOIS
ISSUES

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GOP Out with the old

Some Illinois Republican leaders want to clean house, starting with the removal of Robert Kjellander Jr., a politically controversial GOP national committeeman.

Illinois House Minority Leader Tom Cross of Oswego says that the Republican Party has "lost the high ground on ethics," causing a public perception problem highlighted by November's general election results.

Cross says Kjellander, a Springfield lobbyist and consultant, is a "controversial figure who's found himself in an ethical cloud" and has become a detriment to the party.

He and other Illinois House Republicans plan to introduce legislation this session to oust Kjellander before his four-year term ends in 2008.

Kjellander has reportedly been linked to a federal investigation into hiring and contracting practices of Democratic Gov. Rod Blagojevich's administration.

Phone and e-mail messages to Kjellander were not returned.

Danville Republican Rep. Bill Black says the party can't wait two more years to wipe the slate clean, attract new members and rebuild from a damaging year, including the federal corruption conviction last spring of former Gov. George Ryan.

"Good Lord, the state of Illinois needs to take a giant broom and start sweeping," says Black.

In 2005, a measure sponsored by state Sen. Chris Lauzen, an Aurora Republican, proposed electing that party's state central committee representatives by congressional district rather than by ward or precinct. The measure stalled in the House, but even if approved into law, the change wouldn't take effect until 2008.

Cross says that would be too little, too late.

That Senate bill "would do nothing to take care of the clout of Bob Kjellander," Cross says. "There are policy disagreements among our party about the pros and cons [of the bill]. I don't see any policy arguments or any arguments against the removal of Bob Kjellander."

Bethany Carson