

July 29, 1997, TUESDAY, FINAL MARKETS

**Can't recall MSI meeting: Edgar**

By Dave McKinney

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SPRINGFIELD-A relaxed Gov. Edgar took the stand today in the Management Services of Illinois trial and said he has no direct recollection of what was said at a key meeting with officials of the firm on trial here on federal corruption charges.

Asked to what extent state contracts were awarded on political considerations, Edgar said, "I'm not saying that hasn't been a factor in some cases over the years," but he said that there's been no link to his decisions.

Edgar said there was no way for him to keep track of all state contracts.

He described what he remembered of a briefing before the May, 1994, meeting. "What I was told about MSI: 'Their work is fine; there's no problem there. Nothing to raise a red flag to keep us from scheduling such an event (the meeting).' "

Edgar's appearance at the federal courthouse in Springfield came after prosecutors wrapped up their case today against MSI, its former ownership team and an ex-Public Aid administrator.

The firm and its owners, who were among Edgar's largest campaign donors in 1990 and 1994, are accused of a bribery-related scheme that allegedly bilked the state welfare agency out of $ 7.1 million.

Throughout the months leading up to this summer's trial, Edgar has tried to distance himself from the scandal.

The governor's appearance as the defense's first witness marks the first time in 75 years that a sitting Illinois governor has testified in a criminal case.

Attorneys representing MSI owner William Ladd made the decision to call Edgar to testify.

One focus of questioning was the circumstances behind a May, 1994, dinner meeting Edgar had with four MSI officials, including Ladd and the firm's ex-owner, Michael Martin.

That meeting was held after the company officials present agreed to commit $ 10,000 apiece to Edgar's re-election campaign, defense attorneys have said. The governor also was the subject of testimony last week when his personal secretary and deputy chief of staff each told jurors about Martin's role in obtaining two computers for Edgar's own use.

A personal computer Edgar received as a gift in 1994 came from a group of businessmen that included Martin. The governor also spent more than $ 17,000 on a laptop computer and software that Martin provided.