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**Top Edgar aides may testify in bribe trial**

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SPRINGFIELD-Gov. Edgar's personal secretary and four top aides are among more than 100 state government insiders who may testify in next month's Public Aid bribery trial, federal prosecutors confirmed Tuesday.

Management Services of Illinois and its former owners, who collectively represented one of Edgar's most generous political donors, face charges of bilking the state out of at least $ 7.1 million in an alleged bribery scheme involving officials in the state Public Aid Department. The company was hired to screen Medicaid recipients for private health insurance.

At a pretrial hearing Tuesday in U.S. District Court, more details began to unfold about how the government intends to proceed in its case.

Prosecutors provided MSI defendants with tapes of conversations made between key figures in the case and an MSI secretary wearing a hidden microphone. Prosecutors would not say what is in the recordings.

U.S. District Judge Richard Mills Tuesday set the date for jury selection in the case for between June 11 and 18. Lawyers in the case estimate the trial will last four to six weeks.

Before the trial begins, Mills has to decide whether to allow evidence showing that one of the indicted state officials in the case, suspended Public Aid deputy director James R. Berger, failed a lie-detector test after seeking federal immunity. A hearing on that matter is set for Thursday.

Included among those who may be called to testify are Edgar's deputy chief of staff, Andrew Foster; the governor's press secretary Mike Lawrence; Edgar's personal secretary, Sherril Struck; Edgar's policy director, Stephen B. Schnorf, and Public Aid director Robert Wright.

Though prosecutors said they did not intend to call the governor himself, an attorney representing one of the key defendants repeated an earlier statement indicating Edgar's testimony may be necessary.

"(The governor's) philosophy was of privatization of a lot of the things in government," said attorney Patrick Tuite, who represents former MSI owner Michael Martin. "If there's going to be an issue as to why Public Aid didn't do a good job and MSI was contracted, then explain it. If their witnesses don't explain it, we'll ask (Edgar) to explain it."