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**Getting Madigan’s ear;**

**Speaker's campaign foot soldiers overwhelmingly had government ties**

By Dave McKinney and Patrick Rehkamp

Staff reporters

SPRINGFIELD-When a Metra employee named Patrick Ward complained to Illinois House Speaker Michael Madigan last year that he wasn't being paid enough, his gripe got him a higher-paying job.

And it ultimately led Alex Clifford to leave the transit agency's top post with a hefty severance deal and a host of explosive complaints about patronage demands that are now under review by a governor's task force.

One reason Ward had Madigan's ear: He'd done political grunt work the powerful Southwest Side Democrat needed.

Before going to Madigan for a raise, Ward went door to door for him, gathering voters' signatures in October 2011 to ensure the speaker got on the ballot the following spring.

Ward was a small but important cog in the Madigan re-election effort - one of 30 people who circulated the nominating petitions he needed to get on the 2012 ballot.

As many as 29 of the 30 people work or previously worked in government; a dozen acknowledge working for local governments. Another 17 appear either to currently be getting a government paycheck or to have been as of last year, based on payroll records that match their names and dates of birth or home addresses.

"It's not surprising that people involved in government get involved in politics," Madigan spokesman Steve Brown says. "It is what it is."

A close examination of the 2011 Madigan petition circulators - as well as payroll records, pension records, campaign-finance reports and interviews - shows the campaign foot soldiers:

--In many case hold jobs for which politics isn't supposed to be a factor in hiring, including sanitation laborer, plumber, truck driver, cashier and court reporter.

--Collectively were being paid roughly $2 million a year in their government jobs as of 2012.

--In some instances - Ward, for example - are drawing a government paycheck and a public pension.

--Contributed more than $200,000 altogether to political funds for Madigan or his daughter, Attorney General Lisa Madigan.

--Work for arms of government including the Cook County sheriff's office, the Chicago Department of Water Management, the City Council Committee on Finance, the Illinois Department of Transportation, the CTA, the Cook County recorder of deeds and the state comptroller's office.

In early 2012, Michael Madigan went to Metra seeking a raise for Ward, who was then making $57,000 a year. When that effort failed, the speaker's office got Gov. Pat Quinn's administration to create a job for Ward paying $13,000 more than what he made at Metra.

Clifford wrote a memo to the Metra board saying he felt pressured by Madigan's office to take "politically motivated employment actions," and Clifford ended up being forced out for refusing to do so. Madigan has denied those claims.

Clifford wrote that Madigan - through a Metra lobbyist and then-Metra board member Larry Huggins, who has since resigned - pushed for a raise for Ward.

Huggins has denied that, though Madigan acknowledged his office "forwarded a recommendation to Metra senior staff that Mr. Ward be considered for a salary adjustment."

Clifford also wrote that he asked Ward "why I was getting pressure from Speaker Madigan with regard to his salary."

"Mr. Ward said his family had supported Mr. Madigan for many years and worked on his political campaigns," Clifford wrote. "He said that he had discussed his Metra employment with Mr. Madigan at a Madigan political event, where he told Mr. Madigan that he felt underpaid."

Ward was also getting a $52,700-a-year city pension, bringing his taxpayer-funded compensation at the time to nearly $110,000, the Chicago Sun-Times reported in July.

Metra's board gave Clifford a severance package worth up to $871,000 to hasten his departure and tried to keep details behind his leaving secret. But after word got out, several Metra board members ended up leaving.

Told about how many Madigan petition circulators, including Ward, got government jobs, one of the remaining Metra board members, Jack Schaffer, a Republican who was a state legislator for 20 years, says that's "what [Clifford] and I and the majority of people at Metra didn't want to be involved with - having political people on the payroll based on their clout, not their credentials and willingness to put in an honest day's work.

"You have a good friend who'll take care of you. Clearly, it is what I call the old-style politics. It's still functioning in that organization," Schaffer said.

Ward won't comment.

Other Madigan petition circulators say the speaker had nothing to do with them landing their jobs.

Robert Grogan, 62, a senior securities investigator for Secretary of State Jesse White, was hired in 2002 after working more than 30 years for Cook County. He gets a $74,901-a-year county pension on top of the $85,680 he makes working for White. Since 2001, Grogan has given $12,100 to funds controlled by Madigan and his daughter, and he called himself a "big booster of Democratic politics."

But he said he never felt pressured to give money or do campaign work. "Oh, no, I'm 62 years old, and I wouldn't be pressured to do anything," Grogan said.

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