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**Ryan starts term with an open door**

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SPRINGFIELD-Gov. Ryan didn't exactly announce it as a goal in his inaugural speech, but his first week in office accomplished one thing: elevating the art of schmoozing in state government.

The way Ryan has worked the Statehouse marks a sharp departure from the style of Jim Edgar, a governor who didn't drink or feel entirely comfortable mixing it up with legislators or reporters.

Ryan dropped in unannounced on top legislative leaders such as Senate President James "Pate" Philip (R-Wood Dale) and House Speaker Michael Madigan (D-Chicago), just to chat.

He strode several times along the Capitol's famed brass rail to hobnob with lobbyists.

He gave rank-and-file lawmakers audiences in his office.

He even held two press conferences in one day.

"There is a true, true feeling that it's sort of polite and kind again around here," said Sen. Vince Demuzio (D-Carlinville), who attributed much of that mood change to Ryan's presence.

Without doubt, Ryan is fully immersed in the honeymoon period of his governorship.

"I was just delighted when he walked around the rail," said lobbyist James Fletcher, whose clients include Commonwealth Edison, Arlington International Racecourse and other prominent interests. "He was warmly received and clearly enjoyed being up there, meeting with old friends and just renewing acquaintances. It was a great symbol."

Unlike Edgar, who entered office facing a mountain of debt and presided over painful job layoffs, Ryan has the luxury of taking things at a relaxed pace in his early days as governor. That's because there's more than $ 1.2 billion of excess state money sitting in the bank.

If there is one thing that many legislators see in Ryan, a former House speaker, it is an opportunity to be heard. A perception exists that they can get the governor's ear without having to jump through bureaucratic hoops.

"I've never served under another governor, until now. This one is quite accessible, and that's a big change," said Sen. Steve Rauschenberger (R-Elgin), chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee. "I had less than 20 minutes in six years with the past governor in groups of less than 10."

One lawmaker -- Rep. Wyvetter Younge (D-East St. Louis) -- went to an extreme by bursting into Ryan's office the moment a news conference was about to begin and saying, "I need to meet with you."

"Right now?" Ryan responded, somewhat taken aback.

Longtime legislative observers say Ryan always has operated this way, holding high respect for the Legislature.

But as his term advances and if he must deal with hostile fire, either from federal prosecutors dealing with the commercial driver's license scandal or from the General Assembly, the pleasantries probably will be scaled back.

In the meantime, the friendly mood in the Statehouse -- an atmosphere usually beset by intense partisan sniping -- is a welcome respite. And Ryan seems to be enjoying it, along with his newfound clout.

When Ryan presided over swearing-in ceremonies in the Illinois Senate, Demuzio stepped to his microphone and egged on the new governor: "I can see the new power rippling through your muscles."

Ryan replied to a chorus of laughter: "You ain't seen nothing yet."