

February 01, 2001, THURSDAY, Late Sports Final Edition

**Ryan touts new ethics rules; Governor wants to limit state workers’ role in politics**

By Dave McKinney and James Fuller

Staff reporters

SPRINGFIELD-Stalked by scandal, Gov. Ryan vowed Wednesday to continue pushing for a law prohibiting all state employees from selling political fund-raising tickets or contributing to their elected bosses.

In his annual State of the State address, an upbeat Ryan also dwelt heavily on his legislative accomplishments and laid out an ambitious springtime wish list that includes a Peotone airport, tollway reforms, expanded statewide testing for schoolchildren and continued focus on his moratorium on executions.

The fund-raising proposal would apply to all statewide officeholders. It mimics legislation he pushed through the House but saw die in the Senate last year.

The plan builds on an executive order Ryan signed barring employees under his authority from engaging in the type of fund-raising abuses that led to at least $ 170,000 in illegal license bribes being funneled into his campaign fund.

"It is vitally important that we stop -- now -- the fundamental errors within our political system and government structure that give rise to impropriety and an opportunity for wrongdoing," Ryan said.

That ethics reform represented Ryan's lone, indirect reference to the persistent bribes-for-licenses scandal that has caused his popularity to plummet.

Pressed by reporters, the governor reiterated that he is keeping his options open for a possible second term. But some in his own party, while praising Ryan's legislative prowess, for the first time cast doubts on a second Ryan term in 2002.

"I think it would be very difficult," said Senate President James "Pate" Philip (R-Wood Dale) when asked whether the governor could win re-election.

Ryan nonetheless was treated like royalty Wednesday within the ornate, old walls of the Capitol, where lawmakers greeted him with a standing ovation then interrupted his speech at least 20 times with applause.

The governor said the changing of the guard in Washington, D.C., with a friendly Republican administration, could signal progress for the long-stalled Peotone airport proposal.

"The time is right -- politically, economically and practically -- to begin serious discussions about a new airport in Peotone," said Ryan, who later declined to say whether he might be willing to throw new runways at O'Hare Airport into a deal to make it palatable to Mayor Daley.

Although such a gesture could speed up a Peotone deal, House Speaker Michael Madigan (D-Chicago) questioned whether Ryan would have the stomach to go against the GOP-rich suburbs, which staunchly oppose new O'Hare runways.

"It would require a very, very difficult political decision by the governor because he'd be turning his back on his political supporters in Republican areas around O'Hare Airport," he said.

Ryan's proposal for expanded statewide testing of public school students drew the wrath of teachers unions and represents an about-face from a campaign pledge, in which Ryan promised a "moratorium on further changes in testing."

Aides said the governor wants children in grades three through 10 to take a standardized reading and math test in a move he said would "strengthen accountability for students, teachers and local schools." Now, students in grades three, five and eight face such state tests.

Ryan also renewed his desire to reduce congestion on Chicago-area tollways. A report he commissioned recommended the state back tollway debt to enable the transit system to tear down tollbooths. Ryan did not endorse a specific plan.