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**Scandal taints Ryan image, not abilities; legislators say he's still effective**

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Staff reporters

SPRINGFIELD-Gov. Ryan found some solace from colleagues in the Capitol on Tuesday after his close friend was indicted on corruption charges, though a few worried the scandal is weakening his leadership and credibility.

Senate President James "Pate" Philip was less than reassuring when he was pressed on whether Ryan could not have known about crimes that occurred on his watch.

"You know, it's hard to tell."

Ryan remains an effective leader, Philip added, though it is too early to tell if the growing scandal will hurt the Republican agenda with elections in the fall.

"Hopefully, it will make him a little more cooperative," chided Philip (R-Wood Dale), who battled Ryan over making illegal gun possession a felony.

Sen. Steve Rauschenberger (R-Elgin), chairman of the powerful Senate Appropriations Committee, said the scandal has not harmed Ryan's ability to hammer out a budget with the Legislature.

But it has damaged his ability to "marshal the bully pulpit," and has hurt his credibility with voters, he said.

"I'm not sure they understand the secretary of state's office," Rauschenberger said. "But when the inspector general is the one indicted, I think it's hard for people to believe that (Ryan) didn't know anything about it."

Alluding to Watergate and the Iran-Contra scandal, Rauschenberger said, "I think most people thought Nixon knew, Reagan knew, Bush knew."

House Minority Leader Lee Daniels (R-Elmhurst), a close Ryan ally, said it's entirely plausible that Ryan did not know of the corruption that flourished in his office.

"That's what he tells me. That's what he tells you. That's what he tells the Illinois public," Daniels said. "I believe him. I know George Ryan to be a man of high integrity."

Across the aisle, Senate Minority Leader Emil Jones (D-Chicago) also defended Ryan and expressed doubts that the scandal would directly implicate the governor.

"We've been friends since 1972," he said. "And I would never say anything bad about a friend.

"He'll be exonerated," Jones added. "And I hope he remains as governor."

House Speaker Michael Madigan (D-Chicago) refused to comment directly on Tuesday's indictment but said the news should not undercut legislative support for Ryan's agenda.

"I would say again that he has got very good legislative people skills," Madigan said. "I expect that he'll exercise those, and he'll get a clear majority of what he requests from the Legislature."

Madigan said the scandal should not eclipse Ryan's duties.

"The people realize that there's a cloud that's gathered, but they still expect the chief executive to continue to perform," he said.

Ryan's opponent in the gubernatorial election, Glenn Poshard, raised numerous questions about corruption in the secretary of state's office during the campaign. But contacted Tuesday in Carbondale, the Southern Illinois University administrator declined comment.