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**Tales of clout; Feds subpoena papers full of revealing insights into what made ex-governor tick**

By Dave McKinney

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SPRINGFIELD--Being blunt about how scandal had ruined George Ryan's political fortunes almost cost state Sen. Wendell Jones $1.7 million.

In early 2001, after the Palatine Republican told the Chicago Sun-Times it would be a "good thing" if Ryan didn't seek re-election, the former governor retaliated in private by halting Illinois FIRST construction projects in Jones' district for three months.

Realizing he had ruffled Ryan's feathers, the senator asked for and was granted a special audience with him. In a memo to the governor about the meeting, a Ryan aide attached the news article and wrote that Jones would "apologize for comments he made regarding your re-election chances. Senator Jones says he regrets the comments and did not want to offend you with them."

After the apology, Jones now recalls, "all of a sudden, my projects began to move. That's the way George Ryan was."

That behind-the-scenes power play showcasing Ryan's notorious thin skin is detailed in a stash of scheduling and briefing documents turned over to the Illinois State Archives last January by Ryan's deputy scheduler and unearthed by the Sun-Times.

Offering a revealing portal into his administration, the papers have attracted federal investigators. Ryan's daily schedules for his four years in office were subpoenaed from the archives last month, the Sun-Times has confirmed.

Whose names were scratched off of Ryan's official birthday list once they were indicted? What state senator whose son committed murder asked Ryan unsuccessfully to move the young man to another prison? How did Ryan use his Illinois FIRST public works program to help a former high school classmate and a congressman in a tough primary?

The answers and several other stories from the archives are laid out here.

**A valuable 'thank you'**

Politicians almost always say there is no link between their decisions and campaign contributions. But check out an Oct. 20, 2000, memo describing Ryan's meeting with two lobbyists and a legislator.

Ryan was scheduled to meet that day with two lobbyists for the state's coroners, Brian Duffy and William Anderson, at the Thompson Center. State Rep. Angelo "Skip" Saviano (R-Elmwood Park) also was expected.

"Mr. Duffy and Mr. Anderson will both have fund-raising checks for you on Friday, but they will give them to Skip Saviano before the meeting so that Skip can give them to you at a more appropriate time," Ryan's legislative liaison Kraig Lounsberry wrote. "The coroners would like to thank you."

The checks included $3,000 from the Illinois Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners and $1,000 from Tierney, Duffy and Tierney, which was Duffy's firm. Duffy and Anderson represented the coroners group, which had pushed legislation that Ryan signed in July 2000, granting coroners an annual stipend of $6,500 from the state. Duffy also represented the nonprofit Veterans Leadership Program and "would like to thank you for continuing to support" the group, which helped veterans get jobs and relied on $750,000 in state funding in 2000.

**A George-ous smile**

The clock said it was still a state workday, but no one seemed to be watching.

With plenty of hoopla, Ryan welcomed presidential candidate George W. Bush to Springfield on Aug. 12, 1999. Ryan toasted Bush at a crowded 2 p.m. rally at the Capitol, then arranged to have photos taken for nearly 120 people who worked mostly in state agencies and had committed to help Bush win the Illinois primary.

"Field staff and senior staff are being allowed this opportunity to have photos taken with you and Governor Bush," a briefing memo for Ryan stated.

From 4 to 4:20 p.m.--the state workday routinely ends at 4:30 p.m.--a parade of employees posed one by one between both Georges in the Executive Mansion library while a state photographer snapped away.

State records show the photographer was not on leave at the time. Other workers later recalled they weren't given explicit instructions on using vacation or comp time for what very clearly was a campaign-related event.

"This was George Ryan's thank you to people who were ostensibly spending their free time to work for Bush's campaign in Illinois," one photo-shoot participant said.

**The Renaissance man**

The Springfield hotel owned by Republican powerbroker William Cellini hasn't been able to raise enough cash to repay its $15.5 million building loan to taxpayers. Yet it managed to fatten the ex-governor's campaign fund. Cellini hosted four fund-raisers for Ryan at the Renaissance Springfield Hotel, documents show.

**The Ronan empire**

Few lobbyists seemed to have better access to Ryan than former state Rep. Al Ronan, who represents a casino, the cable television industry, hospitals and many suburbs, among other entities.

In one briefing memo from Ryan's budget director, Steve Schnorf, Ronan was credited with securing $1.1 million in Illinois FIRST grants for his clients. That fact was presented to the governor as Ronan was looking for another $1.3 million for other clients in late 2002. Those requests appear to have been scrapped because of budget constraints.

Earlier, Ronan arranged a July 16, 2002, meeting with Ryan to discuss state efforts to provide computers to low-income areas. Accompanying Ronan that day, scheduling documents show, was his wife, Cathy Aducci. At the time, she worked for Unisys Corp., a computer services company with significant state and city contracts.

**Friends like these**

Former Illinois State Medical Society lobbyist Donald Udstuen, insurance broker Michael Segal and businessman Larry Warner--all Ryan confidants later indicted on corruption or fraud-related charges--also showed up on Ryan's daily schedules with regularity before their brushes with the law.

Ryan flew with an entourage that included Segal and Udstuen to Washington, D.C., on Aug. 4, 1999. The group met with U.S. House Speaker J. Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.), the rest of the state's congressional delegation and William Daley, who was then U.S. commerce secretary.

In the summer of 2000, Udstuen flew with Ryan to the Republican National Convention in Philadelphia. Ryan's scheduling documents noted events Udstuen planned to attend.

And in June 2001, Segal, Udstuen and lobbyist Ron Swanson were among the invitees to George Steinbrenner's New York Yankees skybox for a $3,000-a-person Ryan fund-raiser organized by Swanson and racetrack owner Billy Johnston.

**Persona non grata**

On Ryan's daily schedules, his staff recorded the birthdays of close friends and associates so the governor had the option of picking up the phone to wish them a happy birthday. In 2002, the year Warner and Udstuen were charged, their names disappeared from the birthday logs on the daily schedules after having appeared regularly in previous years.

**Tee for troopers**

When Ryan ran for secretary of state in 1994, Democrat Pat Quinn made fun of Ryan's use of a security detail by featuring fictional state troopers on a putting green with him. They did actually accompany him on a four-day golf outing/campaign fund-raiser organized by Ronan in July 2001, scheduling records show. It's not known if the troopers had to caddy for Ryan.

The July 18-21 event was based at a Traverse City, Mich., golf resort. The governor bunked with his son George Jr. Ronan roomed with former top Ryan aide Scott Fawell, who last week was sentenced to 61/2 years in federal prison and became the feds' biggest catch yet in the licenses-for-bribes scandal. Several other lobbyists, including Ron Swanson, were there, too.

A schedule, with Ronan's lobbying firm's name on the fax heading, shows a room at the posh resort booked for Ryan's security detail, which was required to show up a day ahead of time. The State Police could not provide details on how many officers were assigned to the Ryan golf trip or how the security detail's costs were covered.

**'Vocal' opponent frozen out**

In December 1998, the Illinois AFL-CIO's Don Johnson indicated he planned to step down as the group's president in 2000. Ryan granted Johnson a private meeting on Feb. 3, 1999. The governor's labor liaison, Frank Cortese, dubbed Johnson "probably the most vocal labor leader that was against your candidacy." Assuming Johnson might ask for a political favor, Cortese had forceful advice for the governor. "Should we do anything for him?" Cortese wrote the governor, answering his question in capital letters. "ABSOLUTELY NOT. Should we listen to what he has to say? ABSOLUTELY, AT ARM'S LENGTH, WITH THE CONSTANT THOUGHT THAT HE WILL NOT BE AROUND AFTER THE YEAR 2000."

**Working for the money**

A year later, Cortese groused about how the state's labor unions weren't coughing up enough money for the Ryan campaign even after the governor pushed through Illinois FIRST and the renovation of Soldier Field. A briefing memo Cortese prepared for Ryan as he was about to meet with the Chicago Federation of Labor's Don Turner and Margaret Blackshere, Johnson's successor at the Illinois AFL-CIO, came attached with a newspaper clipping. It noted how the AFL-CIO had committed $1 million to Glenn Poshard and other Democratic candidates in the summer of 1998. "Not only should the leadership of organized labor support this administration, but the support should be with the same intensity and effort that has been given to so many others in past years," Cortese wrote.

**Politics FIRST**

At the time, Ryan denied politics was behind an announcement touting $795,000 in Illinois FIRST projects obtained by former state Rep. Tim Johnson (R-Sydney), who was in a bitter primary for an open congressional seat.

However, an internal memo prepping Ryan for the event indicates otherwise, noting prominently that "one of Johnson's opponents has raised Illinois FIRST as a campaign issue." The memo also encouraged the governor to pad Johnson's pork tally by bringing up a previously announced $285,000 grant for a sewer plant "since it is one of the major projects sponsored by Representative Johnson," staffer Laurence Msall wrote.

Johnson went on to win the congressional seat.

**$300,000 and an old friend**

The Kankakee Township Fire Protection District wanted to renovate its main station--and it had a little clout behind its $300,000 request to Ryan. The person in charge of the district's finances was Laverne St. Peter, a high school classmate of Ryan's. That relationship never got mentioned in a December 2001 press release announcing the grant. The relationship surfaced in an internal June 24, 2002, briefing memo for a picture-taking session Ryan had with St. Peter and other members of the fire protection board.

**Big brother is watching**

When Ryan rejected state funding in 1999 for a proposed coal museum far Downstate, he had been presented with secret information alleging that the museum's main backer was a tax deadbeat.

Ryan agreed to meet with Chris Ledvina, chairman of the National Coal Museum, to end a sit-in Ledvina was waging in an underground coal shaft to get state financial support for his project in West Frankfort.

A memo briefing Ryan on his Sept. 16, 1999, meeting with Ledvina laid out a litany of problems with the concept. But the most striking aspect of the memo was noted under a bold-printed heading of "confidential": Ledvina was delinquent on his state income taxes for 1994. It also mentioned that he had outstanding personal income tax returns for other multiple years.

A Revenue Department spokesman could not say why that information was made available to the governor's staff. Such details are never given to the public or press.

"I consider that outlandish, it's probably illegal, and it's certainly a massive personal affront to a relatively non-public figure," Ledvina said Sunday when told of the memo. "Like 98 cents I was delinquent on my state taxes."

The taxes were never mentioned in the contentious 1999 meeting, but Ledvina recalled with renewed interest the way it ended. "He stuck his index finger in my chest and said, 'If you go back into the coal mine, you'll piss me off, and you don't want to piss me off.'"

**Big-screen governor**

Ryan was elated to be the subject of a Mike Wallace interview on "60 Minutes" about his decision to halt executions in Illinois. When the show aired, Ryan was in far southern Illinois and not about to miss seeing his face on camera. His schedule on April 30, 2000, makes special mention that his room at the Rend Lake Golf Course Condominiums penthouse suite "contains a big screen TV."

**Lincoln Library cronyism**

Ryan got into a nasty fight with U.S. Sen. Peter Fitzgerald, who accused the governor of embracing the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum as a way to reward his cronies. The governor called the assertion a cheap shot.

But in one unpublicized instance, the son of a Ryan financial backer was hired to produce a video designed for potential high-roller library donors.

A briefing paper for the scheduled Dec. 14, 1999, taping--which was to have included Ryan and wife Lura Lynn--mentioned that "Joe Azzarelli's son [Joseph R. Azzarelli] has been hired to do the production of the video." The elder Azzarelli, a construction magnate, co-hosted a fund-raiser for Ryan in October of that year in Kankakee and had contributed to Ryan's campaign fund less than a month before the scheduled taping.

State Capital Development Board records show that Joseph R. Azzarelli's firm, Envision Digital Imaging, was paid $19,736 to produce the donor video.

**A lesson in spin**

To ensure that the Lincoln Library and Museum would be associated with him when he left office, Ryan signed off on a glitzy $287,000 dedication ceremony in November 2002 even as he was cutting agency budgets and laying off workers because of a growing financial crisis.

Former Ryan press secretary Dave Urbanek prepped the governor should questions arise about the ceremony's cost. The amount, Urbanek counseled, was "a bargain considering the jobs and economic activity being created, as well as the worldwide attention for Springfield and Illinois."

The library still hasn't opened and may not by year's end.

**A favor sought**

State Sen. Rickey Hendon (D-Chicago) had a delicate question to pose to Ryan about a painful topic. Hendon's son Tamar Watkins is serving a 30-year sentence at Dixon Correctional Center for the 1996 gang-related murder of Eric Powell, whom Watkins shot 14 times. Hendon asked for and was granted an Oct. 29, 2002, meeting with Ryan to ask that his son, an inmate since March 1999, be moved to another prison. A memo prepared by a trio of Ryan's aides does not make clear why Hendon made the request. State prison records show no move took place.

Ryan, asked Sunday about the subpoenaed documents, said: "I have no comment on any of it."

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