

July 26, 1997, SATURDAY, Late Sports Final Edition

**Edgar testimony set for Tuesday;**

**First defense witness in MSI trial**

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SPRINGFIELD-Gov. Edgar, who has tried to distance himself from the players accused in the MSI corruption scandal, will be the defense's first witness Tuesday in the firm's bribery trial.

At the close of Friday's hearing in federal court here, the attorney representing MSI owner William Ladd announced to U.S. District Judge Richard Mills that Edgar will be called to testify immediately after government prosecutors wrap up their case Tuesday morning.

The Chicago Sun-Times was the first to report last Tuesday that defense attorneys intended to call Edgar to the federal courthouse in Springfield next week. Management Services of Illinois and its owners were among Edgar's largest campaign donors in 1990 and 1994.

Edgar will be the first sitting Illinois governor to testify in a criminal matter since 1922, when Gov. Len Small was indicted but later acquitted on conspiracy and embezzlement charges from a previous term as state treasurer. Unlike Small, Edgar is not accused of criminal wrongdoing.

Ladd's attorney, J. Steven Beckett, recently subpoenaed the governor's datebook covering May, 1994, when Ladd and three other MSI officials had a dinner meeting with Edgar at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Chicago. Each MSI official at the meeting pledged $ 10,000 toward Edgar's re-election that year.

Beckett declined to answer questions Friday afternoon about what he intends to ask Edgar.

Edgar spokesman Thomas Hardy said Edgar is unlikely to be able to "shed any light on this simple bribery matter." Hardy characterized the defense's strategy in calling Edgar to testify as a "diversionary tactic" and "grandstanding."

"Gov. Edgar has run an honest administration. That's been his history and will continue to be," Hardy said.

Defense attorney Patrick Tuite, who represents indicted former MSI owner Michael Martin, said Edgar will be a key witness to prove that the politically connected computer firm did nothing illegal.

Edgar could "establish he wouldn't enter into a dishonest contract as governor of the state of Illinois, nor would any member of his Cabinet," Tuite said.

So far, while Edgar himself has not been implicated, many witnesses have said his former deputy chief of staff Michael Belletire, now the Illinois Gaming Board's top administrator, played a key role in winning approval for renegotiation of MSI's contract with the state Public Aid Department. Belletire has denied wrongdoing.

Ladd, Martin and former Public Aid official Ronald Lowder are accused in a bribery-related scheme that federal prosecutors say defrauded the state welfare agency out of at least $ 7.1 million.

At issue is a 1993 contract renegotiation with Public Aid that enabled MSI's billings to the state to jump from $ 417,000 to $ 11.2 million in a one-year period.

Government prosecutors did not call Edgar to the stand during the more than four weeks it has taken to present most of their case against MSI. But Assistant U.S. Attorney Rodger Heaton predicted the governor's testimony will only strengthen the prosecution's case.

"I can't think of a witness who wouldn't help our case," Heaton said.