

May 24, 2004 Monday

**Rep. Madigan's staff gets raises amid budget woes;** **Speaker's 4% boost may aid state workers' case in contract talks**

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SPRINGFIELD-House Speaker Michael Madigan has doled out 4 percent raises to his senior staff in recent weeks at a time when the Legislature and Gov. Blagojevich have been feuding over where to find the dollars to erase a budget shortfall expected to exceed $1.7 billion.

When the state was flush with cash, a jump in pay of 4 percent would merit little attention. But now, with threatened massive layoffs, possible business tax and fee increases and a new state employee contract under negotiation, pay raises are an increasingly sensitive topic in state government.

Madigan (D-Chicago) has proposed a state spending freeze beginning in July. But in early April, he issued raises to his chief of staff, top lawyer, press secretary, budget director and issues director. The highest paid of that bunch, Chief of Staff Tim Mapes, saw his annual pay go from $142,416 to $148,104, state records show.

Madigan aides justified the increases, saying the speaker wants to retain quality staff. Also, fewer employees have had to shoulder a larger work burden under the constraints of a tight budget that expires in late June.

"The raises all occurred within the budget we were given," said Madigan spokesman Steve Brown, whose contract with the speaker rose from $78,000 to $81,120. "My guess is there have been raises all over government."

A Chicago Sun-Times examination of what key officeholders are paying their senior staffs found that to be partly true. None of the increases, however, has exceeded what the speaker's office pays.

This past week, Gov. Blagojevich said he believed government salaries should remain in check. He articulated that position when asked about the state Supreme Court's ruling ordering that judges be given two years of back pay that the governor had attempted to block.

"This is not a time for judges to get pay raises," the governor said. "It's not a time for governors to get pay raises. That's why I vetoed my own pay raise and vetoed the pay raise for the judges. It sends all the wrong signals."

Blagojevich's office, which needs Madigan's cooperation to draft a new state budget by a critical Memorial Day deadline, declined to comment on the speaker's pay increases.

Senate President Emil Jones (D-Chicago) has not decided whether to increase pay for his top deputy, chief of staff Courtney Nottage, a spokeswoman said.

In January, Republican state Treasurer Judy Baar Topinka handed pay increases to senior aides of 3 percent, boosting the salary for her chief of staff, Nancy Kimme, to $113,004, records show.

The new chief of staff for Senate Minority Leader Frank Watson (R-Greenville), Brian McFadden, got a 3.5 percent salary increase in February. His pay now stands at $99,948.

High-level aides under Secretary of State Jesse White, Attorney General Lisa Madigan and Comptroller Dan Hynes have had their pay remain the same so far in 2004. The same is true in the office of House Minority Leader Tom Cross (R-Oswego).

"Our approach is we're mindful there's a fiscal crisis and you don't want to look like you're being lavish in these times," Cross spokesman David Dring said, noting his office last year managed to return $200,000 to the treasury.

Elsewhere, rank-and-file state workers this year got a 4 percent increase in the last year of a four-year deal that was negotiated when the state was not awash in red ink. The state's contract with the American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees Council 31 ends this year, and many Statehouse observers expect a less generous deal ahead.

Asked about the raises Madigan's staffers got, AFSCME deputy director Roberta Lynch said she saw no problems. "Even if these are tight budget times, I think given how hard they work at the Capitol and the rise in the cost of living, I don't think that's an unreasonable increase," she said.

However, some believe that Madigan's move gives AFSCME greater bargaining leverage.

"I don't know how the speaker tells AFSCME hard luck this year and gives his own staff 4 percent," said one senior Republican senator, who asked not to be named.

Madigan's payrolling policies have drawn scrutiny and controversy in the past. In 2001, the speaker awarded at least $130,000 in bonuses to dozens of top aides.

In 2002, the FBI subpoenaed the speaker's office for documents involving some of those tax-funded bonuses. But no one ever was accused of wrongdoing, and that federal inquiry appears to have stalled.