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**Ex-Ryan aide calls license probe unfair**

By Dave McKinney

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SPRINGFIELD-Gov. Ryan's image has been wrongly tainted by overzealous media and by a "totally unfair" federal probe into widespread corruption during his eight years as secretary of state, Ryan's former chief of staff complained Tuesday.

Longtime Ryan aide Scott Fawell also said he hopes the Kankakee Republican will seek another term as governor, despite unprecedented low approval ratings.

"I think what they've done to the governor and to others is totally unfair," said Fawell, who served as Ryan's top aide for most of his two terms as secretary of state.

"What haunts him, besides the members of the media who keep pounding on him, is this innuendo and rumor out there that there is trouble somewhere afoot.

"Everything that's been written has been absolutely untrue," said Fawell, head of the Metropolitan Pier and Exposition Authority. "We did the best we could. We ran the place honestly."

Through almost three years, federal prosecutors have racked up close to three dozen convictions.

Neither Fawell nor the governor have been charged with wrongdoing. Fawell said he has not been identified as a target.

Most of the convictions have involved the illegal sale of truck and driver's licenses for bribes.

Fawell called on prosecutors to wrap up their probe, which he said is "in the bottom of the ninth."

"I think this game has come to an end," he said.

But the end is hard to predict, particularly given this month's guilty plea by longtime Fawell friend Larry Hall.

Hired by Fawell to oversee secretary of state properties in the Chicago area, Hall admitted to participating in a kickback scheme while in the secretary of state's office, and has been cooperating with investigators for the last 18 months.