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**Press getting the silent treatment**

By Dave McKinney

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SPRINGFIELD-Gov. Ryan has pledged full cooperation with federal prosecutors investigating corruption in his old office, but the same can't be said of his dealings with the press over the issue.

With the indictment of his longtime friend Dean Bauer, Ryan's apparent strategy in dealing with questions about the issue has come down to two words: no comment.

Legal experts and a prominent political consultant endorse his move to silence, but at least one government watchdog group says the public is entitled to hear more from the governor.

Following his budget address, Ryan threatened to end an impromptu news conference if reporters persisted in asking about his indicted former inspector general, who is accused of covering up cases that might have embarrassed Ryan.

On at least two occasions, Ryan did not vary from written statements expressing sympathy for Bauer. The governor refused to say whether he had been interviewed by the FBI or to discuss his working relationship with Bauer.

Ryan's office declined to comment on his strategy, but a top aide said the governor's legal advisers have been calling the shots: "The PR guys are purely support personnel, and you have to defer to the lawyers."

Ronald J. Allen, a Northwestern University criminal law professor, agreed. "It would almost be malpractice not to advise him to do exactly what he is doing," he said.

"They don't want an indictment, and they don't want to be an unindicted co-conspirator a la Richard Nixon," Allen said, referring to how the former president was implicated in the Watergate cover-up.

Democratic political consultant David Axelrod said Ryan's silence may be the best method to squelch a feeding frenzy in the media over the scandal.

"If you talk about this at every opportunity, then every story that's written will be about this. That may happen anyway. But there's no sense aiding and abetting (the media) in (its) efforts to continue the story," he said.

Axelrod said Ryan's focus on major policy moves, such as last weekend's announcement of a moratorium on the death penalty, could shift public focus from the scandal.

The announcement coincided with a Chicago Sun-Times report last Sunday on the scandal. It reported that Ryan spoke directly with an investigator in his old office about a 1994 case in which an employee was believed to have stolen state money to buy Ryan fund-raising tickets.

"It's a good strategy to be doing big, important things to send a strong signal that you're still the governor and you're doing your job. For one, it gives (the media) something else to write about. Number two, it's an important signal to send that you're not paralyzed by this trouble," Axelrod said.

But Cindi Canary, director of the Illinois Campaign for Political Reform, said an increasingly concerned public needs to hear Ryan respond to some of the questions.

"I think it would be helpful if we could resolve as many questions as we could because it does feel like a very open wound right now," she said.