

October 27, 1999, WEDNESDAY, Late Sports Final Edition

**Ryan meets Castro;**

**Governor driven to presidental palace**

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HAVANA-Gov. Ryan began what could be a marathon meeting late Tuesday with Cuban President Fidel Castro, offering a dramatic conclusion to the governor's historic trip to the communist nation.

Greeted by a group of green-uniformed Cuban officials, Ryan left his Havana hotel just before 6 p.m. Chicago time and headed to the presidential palace to meet with the Cuban leader.

Along for the ride were first lady Lura Lynn Ryan; House Speaker Michael Madigan; his wife, Shirley Madigan; House Minority Leader Lee Daniels; Senate Minority Leader Emil Jones, and Ryan chief of staff Bob Newtson.

"What the governor was told was (to) prepare for a long evening. As is the president's custom, he usually likes his guests to stay quite a while," Ryan spokesman Dave Urbanek said.

"The governor was very excited going into this meeting. It is something that only comes around once in somebody's life, and it's a terrific way to start to wrap up this trip," he said.

Ryan, the first sitting governor to visit Cuba in 40 years, is due back in Chicago today. A group of nearly 90 officials, business leaders and reporters joined the governor on the taxpayer-funded trip, which began Saturday.