

July 30, 2000, SUNDAY, Three Star Edition

**Scandal proves costly for Ryan;**

**Legal defense fees mounting for governor**

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Staff reporters

SPRINGFIELD-Gov. Ryan dipped into his campaign fund for $ 173,000 during the last year to fight lawsuits trying to link him to the licenses-for-bribes scandal.

In state campaign documents filed late Friday, Ryan disclosed that he had spent nearly $ 94,000 on legal bills since January, all of which were related to court battles with the Better Government Association. This amount is in addition to about $ 79,000 he had paid during the previous six months.

Some political observers said the size of Ryan's legal tab is staggering.

"That's an awful lot of money to be shelling out for defending yourself for something you allegedly have nothing to do with," said John Pelissero, dean of Loyola University's political science department.

While Ryan used his campaign fund to pay legal fees in the BGA's federal lawsuit, taxpayers will pay the legal bills for defending Ryan in the BGA's state lawsuit. None of those bills has been paid.

The majority of his legal costs during the first half of this year --  $ 58,000 -- went to Winston & Strawn, the Chicago law firm run by former Gov. James R. Thompson. The balance of Ryan's legal tab was paid to Altheimer & Gray, another Chicago law firm that employs Ryan legal adviser Jeremy Margolis.

Since last July, Winston & Strawn has billed Ryan's campaign fund nearly $ 132,000, campaign records show.

Both Thompson and Margolis have defended Ryan in the BGA's lawsuits in state and federal court. The Chicago watchdog group alleges that the governor orchestrated the license-selling scheme as secretary of state in a bid to fill his campaign coffers, though its lawsuits have been dismissed and are being appealed.

"This is all tied to the frivolous Terry Brunner, BGA lawsuits that have been twice dismissed," Ryan spokesman Dennis Culloton said Friday.

J. Terrence Brunner, the BGA's executive director, could not be reached to comment.

While the legal fees represent a small dent in Ryan's $ 2.1 million campaign fund, they offer a glimpse of the mounting financial toll from the corruption allegations that stem from his tenure as secretary of state.

Beyond the legal fees linked to the scandal, Ryan paid 45 charities a total of $ 89,968 since January, because the money may have come from bribes paid to employees who raised funds. His total contributions in the last year now exceed the $ 170,000 figure that federal prosecutors have identified as tainted from various license-selling schemes.

"The governor doesn't want anything to do with the ill-gotten gains of the wrongdoers who have been indicted and convicted," Culloton said.

The largest recipient of those donations was the Maryville Academy in Des Plaines, which took in $ 25,000 since last July.

Pelissero said the donations would not likely win Ryan favor from voters, who have given him low approval ratings in a series of polls because of the scandal. Ryan has not been accused of criminal wrongdoing.

"It's a weak attempt on the governor's part to try to make right something that probably can't be made right, by simply giving away to charity what was illegally gotten to begin with," Pelissero said. "I think the public is a lot smarter than to think everything will be OK if he gives that away to charity."

During the first six months, Ryan took in $ 610,000, much of which came from state contractors. His single largest donation was $ 20,000 from Rosemont Mayor Donald Stephens.