

March 31, 1996, SUNDAY, Late Sports Final Edition

**Big Split in Springfield;**

**Republicans At Odds Over School Plan**

By Dave McKinney

Springfield bureau chief

SPRINGFIELD-On paper, Gov. Edgar, Senate President James "Pate" Philip and House Speaker Lee Daniels compose a once-in-a-generation Republican triumvirate in state government.

Yet, last week the three feuded like President Clinton and the Republican Congress.

Edgar and the legislative leaders are barely on speaking terms after Philip and Daniels attacked to the governor's $ 1.9 billion plan to fund education.

"What Pate Philip did was go out and make the governor look silly," said a senior Edgar administration official, who attributed the plan's flop almost entirely to the Senate president.

In private, Philip does not hide his dislike for Edgar, cursing his name to acquaintances just as he did with former Gov. James Thompson's. Philip's irritation with Edgar has only heightened after this past week.

Edgar, meanwhile, has complained over the years to moderates in the party about Philip's confrontational style. Now, Edgar's aides say that whatever trust he had for Philip has been shaken.

"It might be, how should I say it, frayed a little bit," Philip said, delicately describing his relationship with Edgar after his harsh criticism of the governor's plan.

The concern Daniels (R-Elmhurst) and Philip (R-Wood Dale) had was the plan's net $ 400 million tax increase. Edgar endorsed the findings of a panel headed by former University of Illinois President Stanley Ikenberry.

The group suggested raising state income or sales taxes by $ 1.9 billion and using $ 1.5 billion of that to lower property taxes across Illinois. The balance would raise the state's share of school funding to 50 percent.

The prospect of that plan on the fall ballot in the form of a vaguely-worded constitutional amendment caused Philip and Daniels to worry about losing their narrow majorities in the House and Senate in the November election.

Edgar's camp did not sit silently while his plan was gouged. His aides openly accused the two leaders of reneging on commitments not to trash the plan until after possible legislative hearings this spring.

"In 1992 and 1994, the leaders wanted the governor to appear (with GOP legislative candidates) in their targeted districts. When they perceived it was to their political advantage to stand with the governor, they were all for it. But when they perceived it wasn't to their political advantage, they weren't with him. I think that speaks volumes to their character," said Mike Lawrence, Edgar's press secretary.

Once word of the Edgar plan leaked and it was called a huge tax increase, both Philip and Daniels ran for cover, administration officials said. Philip was the first to publicly declare the plan dead, and Edgar's camp believed it was Philip who prematurely floated its details to deliberately undercut the governor.

"Pate tries to create this impression he's up-front and blunt, but when you let somebody get out there and dangle, that breaks trust," said another senior Edgar administration official.

Philip has been a thorn in Edgar's side before. In 1994, Edgar backed riverboat casinos for Chicago. But Philip blocked the deal, prompting Mayor Daley's taunts that Edgar couldn't deliver "Gov. Philip."

Two years earlier, Edgar supported Daley's Lake Calumet airport, only to have Philip kill that proposal, too.

"I don't know why he should have any problem with me," Philip said Thursday, adding, "The governor, in his first four years, got about 97 percent of what he wanted. This session, we have a different opinion."

Aides to Daniels and Philip said the main problem they faced with Edgar's latest initiative was a lack of detail from Edgar. Both leaders were briefed on the education plan by the governor's staff on March 19, but complained they weren't given the full run-down on his plan.

"That's a cop-out if they say they didn't know the numbers," Lawrence said.

A complicating factor was Lt. Gov. Bob Kustra's stunning loss to state Rep. Al Salvi (R-Mundelein) in the same week Edgar announced his plan. Salvi's victory was credited in part to his attacks on Kustra's position on taxes.

Daniels' camp faulted Edgar's advisers for not delaying release of his plan until later in March, when the election results weren't on everyone's mind.

As if things weren't bad enough for Edgar with Philip and Daniels, the Wall Street Journal skewered the governor's education plan and criticized Edgar's credentials as a possible vice presidential nominee, a post the governor later claimed he doesn't want.

"When a Republican governor decides to go against much of his party and imitate George Bush by proposing a tax increase, it's time for national GOP leaders to take notice," the Journal said in an editorial.

Edgar described the education plan as the most important program of his governorship. Now, only months after his statewide approval rating as measured by polls reached nearly 75 percent, Edgar must deal with the perception that he can't accomplish anything -- unlike Thompson, his wheeling-and-dealing predecessor.

Daniels, while critical of Edgar's handling of the education plan, does not consider the governor to be a weak leader.

"Pate considers Edgar to be weak, as evidenced by his tax increase plan. First, Edgar didn't tell them everything about it and then he proposed a referendum, instead of standing up and taking the heat for it himself," said a Republican with close ties to Edgar, Philip and Daniels.

"Edgar always tries to find some middle ground," this Republican said. "But he puts everything off on other people or on the Legislature and doesn't wind up looking like much of a leader."