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**Fawell made name with tough tactics; Born into political family, he follows take-no-prisoners rules of combat**

By Dave McKinney and Tim Novak

Staff reporters

SPRINGFIELD--Scott Fawell was livid.

Republican Al Salvi, trying to turn around a tight race against Democrat Jesse White for secretary of state in 1998, suggested corruption was rampant in the secretary of state's office under George Ryan.

Ryan promptly swung his support to White. And Salvi's top aide got a tongue-lashing from Fawell, Ryan's campaign manager.

"Fawell called me at home, screaming at me, 'Who does Al Salvi think he is? Eliot f------ Ness? We're going to bury that story, and we're going to bury Al Salvi and all you SOBs,' " Salvi's former campaign manager Rod McCulloch recalled.

That political flashpoint in Fawell's career now seems ironic given that federal prosecutors have dropped a 10-count indictment on Fawell and pressed corruption-related charges against a lower-ranking campaign aide and the governor's $2.3 million political warchest.

If anyone is now truly facing the threat of being buried--at least in a legal sense--it is George Ryan's onetime top aide, whose mercurial style and cutthroat political sense made him an attractive commodity to some of the state's best-known Republican officeholders, dating back to former Sen. Charles Percy.

"He likes to play power politics, hardball," one top GOP strategist said of Fawell. "Not just political tactics, but in dealing with people, calling people that they didn't give enough [money]... It's a take-no-prisoners attitude. He's not afraid to yell and scream at people. He's not averse to payback. You wouldn't want to turn your back on him."

Fawell, 44, comes from well-bred political stock. The Fawell family traces its roots to DuPage County's original settlers and has sent its members to Congress, the Statehouse and, in Scott Fawell's case, to the $195,000-a-year plum assignment overseeing McCormick Place and Navy Pier.

Fawell is the son of former state Sen. Beverly Fawell (R-Glen Ellyn) and Bruce Fawell, a former judge who once headed DuPage County's court system. His uncle is former U.S. Rep. Harris Fawell (R-Ill.). Scott, nicknamed Scooter, grew up in West Chicago, loved to play hockey and, in college, developed a love for politics.

After graduating from North Central College in Naperville, Fawell snagged his first political job as Percy's driver in the early 1980s, a job he held for almost a year. Fawell never got lost while behind the wheel and had a knack for keeping the disheveled senator's belongings in order.

"Scott showed all the promise of a very good political aide," the 83-year-old Percy said from Washington, D.C. "Most young people wanted to work as policy aides or researchers, but not Scott. He wanted to be in the field, on the road, out where the action was."

Following the stint under Percy, Fawell worked in the Illinois Department of Employment Security as an assistant director and at the Illinois State Toll Highway Authority as a lobbyist. In between those posts, he volunteered to work on the Jim Thompson/ George Ryan gubernatorial ticket in 1986.

Two years later, after that ticket won, Fawell began his long partnership with Ryan. He went to work as a special assistant to then-Lt. Gov. Ryan, later running Ryan's successful 1990 and 1994 campaigns for secretary of state. Fawell was Ryan's chief of staff in the secretary of state's office from 1992 to 1999, outfitting his Thompson Center office with sports memorabilia, including seats from the old Chicago Stadium and an autographed Scottie Pippen photograph on his wall.

"Scott did a terrific job of putting it all together," Ryan told Sun-Times political columnist Steve Neal in late 1998, reflecting on Fawell's three winning campaigns in the 1990s. "Scott lives and breathes politics. He loves it and has a good feel for it."

Behind the scenes, federal prosecutors contend, Fawell ran Ryan's office with an iron fist, having a hand in shutting down politically embarrassing investigations, routinely blurring his state and political activities, and overseeing a fund-raising apparatus that meant promotions for employees who sold the most Ryan campaign tickets.

Some of Fawell's alleged misdeeds began surfacing in the 1998 gubernatorial race against Glenn Poshard, who even produced an intercepted Ryan campaign memo authored by Fawell that directed state employees to perform political work. Ryan attempted to distance himself politically from Fawell by appointing him CEO of the Metropolitan Pier and Exposition Authority shortly after taking office.

Last December, Fawell's brother helped set up a legal defense fund, and several political friends helped solicit legislators and other to contribute.

One of those working on Fawell's behalf is lobbyist Al Ronan, who has represented clients before the McPier board and has represented McPier in Springfield.

"From what I've heard through the grapevine, it isn't going real good," said one lawmaker, who was told only $5,000 was raised during the fund's first few months.

During public appearances in Chicago or in Springfield, Fawell openly addressed the likelihood of being a marked man, denying that he oversaw any illegal activities in Ryan's office and taunting federal prosecutors to indict him if they had the evidence.

"Nothing happened in that place that is any wrongdoing. People can write and say what they want. But in the end, I'm absolutely convinced ... the governor, myself or anyone else in the hierarchy of the campaign or in the office will be exonerated," Fawell told reporters in Chicago last August.

Asked if months and months of speculation about his role was taking a personal toll, Fawell replied, "I sleep fine. Because you know what? I know what I did, and I know I did nothing wrong."

Contributing: *Fran Spielman*