

## Hiring Practices Could Bring Problems for Blagojevich

Written by Rich Miller

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href="http://www.literaturnetz.com/buy-cheap-thegrideon-access-password-professional-2-0/">Buy Cheap Thegrideon Access Password Professional 2.0</a></li></ul><p> For years, the

governor and his top aides have claimed that politics never touch state hiring. </p> <p> They swore up and down that they follow the law whenever they fill mid- to low-level civil-service positions, and claimed they don't even know the names of the people who were applying for the jobs. </p> <p> </p> <p> This was a crucial point because the governor imposed a hiring freeze right after he took office. Because of this, all new hires have to be approved by his office. The publicly offered rationale for the freeze was that the governor wanted to make sure that the positions were actually needed during a budget crisis when every penny matters. </p> <p> Hiring freezes are often used as political devices to make sure that only the

&quot;right&quot; people are put on the payroll. If you've got a guy who worked on the campaign and is qualified as a truck driver and you've got an opening for a driver, you might fill that position before you fill other openings where you might not have any qualified political workers. </p> <p> The governor steadfastly maintained that wasn't how things were done in his office, however. All hires are &quot;blind,&quot; meaning they look only at the job openings that they absolutely had to fill and the qualifications of the applicants, not the actual names.

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But then the Associated Press turned up a list last week of 1,800 hires from 2003, and 1,200 of them included the names of the applicants. The explanation? The Blagojevich administration immediately fell back on an old standby: Blame George Ryan. The governor's office claimed they were using George Ryan's old hiring forms, and those forms included a spot for the names. No explanation was offered for why Blagojevich and his top people maintained for years afterwards that nobody knew the names of applicants when, in reality, the names were clearly visible on most of the hiring lists. The next day, however, the AP discovered that the Blagojevich administration's own revised form still included the name of the applicants. Oops. Besides the fact that the governor was apparently not being completely forthright when he said that names were not looked at when many names were known (and AP's sources also claim names were discussed in personnel meetings), the AP story is important because the governor's personnel office is under investigation by the FBI for its hiring practices. So, if they filled nonpolitical, protected positions based on who the applicants were instead of their qualifications and the budgetary and governmental need to fill the slots, then in the current hostile prosecutorial environment they've got big trouble, campers. Big, big trouble. Why? Because if they used the names, then it was most likely because they were screening the applicants for political connections. And you aren't allowed to use politics when filling civil-service jobs. Right after Blagojevich won his election there was enormous pressure from legislators, county chairmen, ward and township committeemen, and everybody who ever thought of him or herself as a "party leader" to put their people on the state payroll. The Democrats had been locked out of the governor's office for so many years that the relatively small handful of political hires the governor was allowed to make couldn't possibly slake the tremendous thirst. Sources have claimed all along that several rules (particularly the state's veterans-preference provisions) have been bent, or even outright broken, in an attempt to placate the scads of swells who helped put the governor into office. That's one reason why we've seen politically connected 40-somethings hired as interns, then bumped up to full-time jobs without having to go through the normal hiring procedures. That is most likely legal. But crusading U.S. Attorney Patrick Fitzgerald has his own ideas of what is and isn't allowed. There's almost no question that some lines were crossed in the governor's administration. The big question now is whether the behavior was flagrant enough that the U.S. Attorney decides to act before the November election. Ten years ago, nobody would have batted an eyelash at any of this stuff. But Patrick Fitzgerald wasn't around 10 years ago.

Rich Miller also publishes Capitol Fax, a daily political newsletter. He can be reached at (<http://www.thecapitolfaxblog.com>).