

## Am I a Cloutless Wonder?

Written by Rich Miller

Tuesday, 04 February 2003 18:00

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Every now and then it might be healthy for a reporter/columnist to get slammed in the media and have his motives and integrity questioned. It could be a humbling experience for those of us who make our livings routinely and cynically questioning the motives and integrity of others. It has been for me.

Back in the day, before George Ryan's former chief of staff Scott Fawell was Public Enemy Number One, he would return my phone calls. In fact, 10 years ago, Fawell was one of the few higher-ups who would ever return my calls.

For reasons I couldn't understand then, and still don't today, Fawell would often spend an hour or more on the phone with me. We'd go over poll results (Fawell loved polls, and had his people in the field all the time), gossip about legislators, talk about bills, and, on a few occasions, even commiserate about our private lives. I truly learned a lot from the guy.

Anyway, we were talking on the phone one day in what I think was 1993 (I actually never met him in person until much later) and I remember for whatever reason grumbling about how hard my social-worker wife was working for practically no money (somewhere around \$15,000 a year with little or no benefits). Fawell said she should apply for a state job, where she'd get better pay and real benefits. I remember the words coming out of my mouth before I could stop them: "Do you guys have any openings?" Fawell said he didn't know, but he'd check. That was a mistake on my part, of course. I shouldn't have asked that question.

Christy, my wife at the time, did turn in an application for a secretary of state job. I called her last week and asked what she remembered. She said she was never brought in for an interview, and said she never really followed up on the job. What it came down to is she didn't want to work for the state, and I didn't blame her. I remember Fawell asking me later about what had happened, and I told him I didn't think she wanted a job, but thanks for asking.

I remember another conversation with Fawell, from a year or so before. Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley was pushing the Illinois General Assembly to let him build a humungous land-based casino. A huge team of lobbyists was working on the project, and some of them put

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together a list of legislators with comments about how each legislator could be “convinced” to support the casino. The list was leaked and much embarrassment ensued.

Fawell ridiculed the “idiot” lobbyists for putting their thoughts on paper. “The first rule in this business is ‘Never write anything down,’” Fawell said at the time.

Evidently, Fawell didn’t take his own advice. As you may know by now, I was mentioned on the very long list (there are 1,100 entries) of people who had “sponsored” others for jobs at the secretary of state’s office during George Ryan’s tenure there. The list reads like a Who’s Who of Ryan’s friends, and a few others, like me, who wondered what the heck their names were doing on there.

What a goofball. The very existence of that list finally proves something to me that I had suspected for a long time. Scott Fawell has never believed that any rules applied to him, even his own. He should have known the trouble that list would cause if it was ever made public. But, I’ll bet it never occurred to him that anyone would ever see it.

So, now, because of that stupid list I have to go through life with people thinking I’m: (1) a George Ryan pawn; (2) somehow corrupt myself; or (3) a cloutless wonder who can’t even get his own wife a job.

If you’ve been reading my column for very long, you know that I bashed George Ryan hard over the years when he deserved it (and when some other major media outlets were going easy on him, like during the 1998 campaign). I ain’t no pawn, and I’ll put my integrity up against anyone else’s. But, looking at that list and seeing how some other mopes got jobs for their wives, I’m starting to think I really am a cloutless wonder.

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