

FRIENDS & FAMILY PLAN: ALDERMEN DIP INTO STEALTH BUDGET TO PUT RELATIVES, CAMPAIGN OPERATIVES ON THE PAYROLL -- AT TAXPAYER EXPENSE

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ABSTRACT

The revelation comes as Mayor Daley prepares to ask a federal judge to end decades of court supervision over City Hall's clout-heavy hiring practices, arguing that patronage is dead. Pope also hired the mother of Al Sanchez, the former city Streets and Sanitation commissioner convicted last year on charges he rigged city hiring to reward people loyal to Daley and his political allies.

FULL TEXT

As City Hall struggles to pay for basic services, a stealth budget account worth millions has allowed Chicago aldermen to put family members, campaign operatives and those with political baggage on yet another taxpayer-funded payroll.

Operating without scrutiny, one alderman hired the mother of a former top mayoral aide later convicted of rigging city hiring. Another hired a city worker ousted for sexual harassment allegations. Several others hired relatives.

"All of us (aldermen) have family members on the payroll," said Ald. Isaac Carothers, 29th, who has paid a relative more than \$30,000 since January 2008. "That's nothing new."

The revelation comes as Mayor Daley prepares to ask a federal judge to end decades of court supervision over City Hall's clout-heavy hiring practices, arguing that patronage is dead. But the city's hiring compliance officer told the Tribune he didn't know about the payroll of about \$1.3 million a year.

Neither did the attorney whose lawsuit led to a ban on most political hiring in the city. He said the practice could be improper.

"If it's not remedied, it's going to have to be presented to the court," said Michael Shakman, the attorney who 40 years ago brought the landmark federal case that led to a court-enforced consent decree on hiring.

The little-known account also represents another pot of money for aldermen to employ people close to them, on top of the tax dollars they receive to hire staff members and their newly expanded expense accounts worth up to \$73,280 a year.

The Tribune examined the payroll for 2008 and the first half of 2009. Aldermen questioned about the practice said the money covers limited wages, without benefits, for people who do important community work in their wards. And they waved off concerns about hiring those with political connections -- including their relatives.

Ald. George Cardenas, 12th, pays his father \$13 an hour, according to city records that show Armando Cardenas puts in 180 hours a month -- the equivalent of 45 hours a week. He made \$23,500 last year, when he was working fewer hours.

The alderman said his father knows the community very well and puts in more hours than he's paid for, assisting residents who contact the office for help.

"He does a lot of things -- a lot of the things in the community that people have no idea about," George Cardenas said.

Carothers refused to say if the William Carothers on his payroll was father or brother, who have the same name. Carothers faces federal bribery charges, and his father, a former alderman, went to prison for public corruption.

Ald. John Pope, 10th, hired a former Streets and Sanitation worker who's supposed to be banned from working for the city.

The worker, Thomas Sadzak resigned from the department in 2005 after city officials recommended he be fired over allegations he sexually harassed a co-worker, according to court documents. He was placed on a list of former employees who should not be re-hired, according to a source.

Pope hired Sadzak and paid him nearly \$18,000 from January 2008 until July 2009, according to the records. During some of that time, Sadzak also appeared on the regular city payroll, records show.

Shakman said Sadzak's continued employment, is "another example of how poor the city is in policing itself."

Pope professed only a vague knowledge of the accusations against Sadzak. "I know he was accused of something," Pope said. "He did resign," Pope said. "He didn't admit guilt."

Sadzak is "a people person" who knows the far Southeast Side ward well and works hard, Pope said. Reached at Pope's office, Sadzak declined to comment.

Pope also hired the mother of Al Sanchez, the former city Streets and Sanitation commissioner convicted last year on charges he rigged city hiring to reward people loyal to Daley and his political allies. Al Sanchez was a leader of the Hispanic Democratic Organization, which helped get Pope elected.

About half a dozen of the names on the payroll match those of people who appeared on a "clout list" that was a key exhibit in the federal trial of former Daley patronage chief Robert Sorch. He was convicted and imprisoned for his role in a scheme to reward political campaign workers with city jobs.

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Around for decades

Other political connections on the payroll include:

- 19th Ward Democratic Committeeman Matthew J. O'Shea, who was paid more than \$43,000 during 2008 and early 2009 to work for Ald. Virginia Rugai in his home ward. She also pays him from her separate aldermanic expense account.

- Delmarie Cobb, who was paid thousands from Ald. Leslie Hairston's campaign fund for political consulting, also received nearly \$28,000 from the city payroll fund between January 2008 and July 2009 to prepare newsletters, news releases and publicize ward meetings for the 5th ward alderman.

The payroll has been around for decades. According to the line item in the budget, aldermen are allowed to hire people "to

perform secretarial, clerical, stenographic, research, investigations or other functions expressly related to the office of aldermen." Employees paid through the fund don't show up on the regular city payroll.

Aldermen doling out dollars

Ald. John Pope, 10th

Paid an ex-Streets and Sanitation worker who's supposed to be banned from city work.

Ald. George Cardenas, 12th

Pays his father \$13 an hour for supervising resident services.

Ald. Leslie Hairston, 5th

Paid nearly \$28,000 to Delmarie Cobb, a Democratic political consultant.

Ald. Virginia Rugai, 19th

Paid 19th Ward Democratic Committeeman Matthew O'Shea for work done in his home ward.

Credit: Chicago Tribune

Illustration

Caption: Photo (color): (City Hall)Phil Velasquez/Tribune filePhoto (color): (Ald. John Pope)Photo (color): (Ald. George Cardenas)Photo (color): (Ald. Leslie Hairston)Photo (color): (Ald. Virginia Rugai)Antonio Perez/Tribune photos

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