

State hires high-powered lawyer to present Pastrick racketeering case

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By Andy Grimm Post-Tribune staff writer

Former East Chicago mayor Robert A. Pastrick will face the lawyer who led the prosecution of former Illinois Gov. George Ryan and Chicago patronage boss Robert Sorich when he heads to court next year to face racketeering charges.

Attorney General Steve Carter has hired former federal prosecutor Patrick Collins to lead the state's case against Pastrick and 28 others in a sweeping civil lawsuit that seeks to recover millions allegedly swindled during the latter years of Pastrick's three decades in office.

"We want to have the strongest team working on behalf of the public," Carter said. "(Collins) has some unique experience."

Collins, who joined the case shortly after leaving the U.S. Attorney's office in April, joins a team that already includes Notre Dame law professor Robert Blakey, who helped craft federal racketeering statutes while with the Justice Department four decades ago.

Collins was lead prosecutor on a dozen public corruption cases during his 12 years with the U.S. Attorney, and made national headlines on his way to winning convictions against Ryan and Sorich.

When Pastrick and his co-defendants go to trial in 2008, Collins will build the civil case against them much as he did the criminal cases against Ryan and Sorich.

"We always looked at it as getting to the bottom of all of it, and that's how I look at this," Collins said.

"I didn't know who Mr. Pastrick is. Now I do know who he is in Northwest Indiana political lore, but it doesn't make a difference."

Pastrick's attorney, Michael Bosch, said politics, namely Carter's 2008 re-election campaign, is behind the high-powered legal help the state is putting behind the civil case.

"There is no allegation against Bob Pastrick other than he was mayor at all the relevant times," Bosch said. "(Even if) they win a verdict, everybody here is either broke or in jail."

Collins will be paid \$395 per hour, considerably more than a staff attorney, but far less than private defense lawyers would earn, Carter said. Any judgment against the defendants could include attorney fees, he said.

Collins also will have to establish a lesser burden of proof to win a civil judgement than a criminal conviction.

A jury in a criminal case must be convinced a defendant is guilty beyond a reasonable doubt; civil juries must believe "a preponderance of the evidence."

"Building a civil case is 100 percent easier," said Dan Webb, who faced Collins as Ryan's defense attorney. "(Collins) works hard and is very organized. He comes across as very confident, and juries like him."

Attorneys who know Collins also remark on his intensity, and occasional fits of temper -- "he's very Irish," said one.

Thomas Durkin, who defended Sorich and also represents Gary power broker Jewell G. Harris Sr., said private help isn't unusual when public bodies take on complex cases. Collins is the best help Carter could've hoped for.

"They'll get their money's worth," Durkin said. "Patrick Collins is a tremendous prosecutor."