

County Board Post: A Part-Time Job?

It was a day in the life of a Cook County commissioner.

John H. Stroger began the morning of Nov. 5 with a visit to his Loop law firm. Within 40 minutes he was rushing off to a Civic Center courtroom to argue a petition. The case was expected to take only 20 minutes, but dragged on for several hours.

It was not until early afternoon that Stroger strolled into his 5th floor office to begin his formal day as an elected \$20,000-a-year County Board member.

Cuts Law Practice

The demands of the job have become so time consuming that Stroger asserts he has been forced to taper off his active law practice, but he adds:

"I try to get into court as much as I can because you

Task Force Report

aren't wedded to government, and the day may come when I won't be a county commissioner any more."

His remarks were more candid than most of the 15 board members whose fidelity to county government is split between political obligations and business interests that make daily demands on their working days.

Includes Board Chief

They all hold important political posts and at least 13 have been or still are partners or owners of businesses that lure them away from their county duties. This includes George Dunne, board president, who earns \$30,000 a year and is also president of Near North Life Insurance Co., 14 E. Chestnut St.

Board members are not required to divorce themselves from these other activities, but the county budget explicitly states they are being paid for a full-time job.

Some commissioners concede their work requires less than eight hours a day, but nearly all of them have a secretary and one or even two administrative assistants. These aides, also budgeted as full-time employees, receive salaries as high as \$1,522 a month, and some of them also hold outside jobs.

More than \$982,178 will be paid out in 1972 for the operat-

ing costs and salaries of 62 people including the commissioners and their staffs—\$40,000 more than 1971.

These figures, however, cannot be seen by a mere glance at the section of the budget under the commissioners' offices, a TRIBUNE Task Force and Better Government Association investigation disclosed.

Salary Is Hidden

The salary of at least one administrative assistant is hidden in the forest preserve budget, and the wages of more than 25 aides and secretaries are buried in the highway

department budget, a practice condemned as "very poor budget procedure" by budget experts.

Dunne explained this arrangement of budget borrowing by saying that county government spends a major portion of its time on highway business and "we thought they [the highway department] should help support the administrative staff."

Vernon Krone, research director for the Civic Federation, a taxpayers watchdog group, was critical of the procedure. He said that if Dunne's expla-

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nation is true, the county should follow the example of the Chicago Park District and have the highway department reimburse the corporate fund for these salaries.

He said that the present arrangement makes it virtually impossible to accurately judge from the budget how the county is spending its money.

Number Not Known

The budget is so misleading, in fact, that the document fails to reflect how many administrative aides are assigned to Dunne. The budget shows he has three assistants and a legislative coordinator earning total salaries of \$68,136 in 1972.

However, he has a fourth aide, William P. Cirone, now budgeted as an assistant to the chairman of finance and salaried to receive \$19,140 a year. Jerome Huppert, Finance Committee chairman, said he has never heard of Cirone.

"Works for Me"

Dunne explained that Cirone became his administrative assistant years ago when Dunne was Finance Committee chairman and "I just never bothered to change it. But he works for me."

Cirone came to Dunne's staff after he was fired as supervisor of Traffic Court clerks for refusing to testify before a county grand jury investigating the 1959 Traffic Court scandal.

Dunne has the final word on whether a commissioner can have an administrative aide, but he said he has never considered whether these aides are actually needed. "It's always been a policy to have them and some people have just stayed on historically," he said.

Refuse to Talk

Altho these salaries are paid by county taxes most of the commissioners balk when asked to account for their time and the work of their staffs. Some flatly refuse to discuss the subject.

The questions put to each commissioner seemed simple, but board member Mathew W. Bieszcza wasn't going to answer a single one.

A reporter asked him how much time the 26th Ward Democratic committeeman and Michael Nardulli, his \$18,264-administrative assistant and ward secretary, actually spend on county board business.

"Give me your questions in



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writing," the former alderman of 14 years and Municipal Court bailiff for six years demanded. "I've been in this business [politics] for a long time, and I have a policy never to talk to reporters."

His request was honored, but the written list of questions was returned with "no comment" typed neatly under each one, including inquiries that were unrelated to Bieszcza's performance as a county commissioner.

However, it was learned elsewhere that Bieszcza is vice president of Joseph T. Baran and Co. and spends most of his afternoons at the insurance company office founded and named after the former 26th Ward boss. Bieszcza was absent during most of the recent budget hearings, sessions which are considered second only in importance to board meetings.

No Account Given

Altho Charles F. Chaplin has earned a reputation as a constant critic of county waste during his 16-year career as a Republican commissioner, he was less than candid in accounting for his time.

"It's none of your business," he snapped when asked how much time he devoted to being sales consultant to Perkins Goodwin Co., a New York based firm and to running Mason Chaplin Travel Inc., a Kenilworth travel agency he owns with his wife.

"Of course, I don't consider being a commissioner as a full-time job. How could I

live on a commissioner's salary alone," said the wealthy Winnetka resident.

Hits Padded Payrolls

Chaplin has been unrelenting in his criticism of padded payrolls and in 1964 he assailed the state's attorney's office for refusing to investigate payroll cheaters and recover taxes paid for their salaries.

Ten years ago Chaplin protested salary increases during budget hearings and said he was strongly opposed to any blanket raises because, "taxes are too high and the taxpayers aren't getting any pay increases."

Yet, Chaplin was the sponsor of a resolution in December, 1970, which increased the salaries of all county commissioners by \$5,000, giving them \$12,000 more than an alderman and \$2,500 more than a state legislator in pay.

And these commissioners are elected to stand guard over the operations of county government and to ensure that their electorate's taxes are being efficiently spent. They are to ensure, among other things, that county employees work a full day for a full day's pay.

Assured of Jobs

But some of their own staff members hold full-time jobs elsewhere, apparently confident that their county posts are secure under the protective wing of their bosses.

Commissioner William H. Harvey has one administrative aide who holds a full time job with a liquor importer while the other ran a construction company until it recently became the subject of a federal investigation.

Charles Bowen is carried on the payroll as a \$990-a-month investigator for the county highway department, but is actually assigned to Harvey as an administrative aide.

Hard Man to Find

Bowen is a difficult man to reach in the county building. He was finally found one weekday morning at the Somerset Importers Ltd., 1 E. Wacker Dr., where he is regional mar-

keting manager supervising sales and advertising.

Bowen said he also spends "25 hours a day" on political work and running Harvey's community activities program in the 2d Ward.

"I've been in the political game for about 15 years," said the 38-year-old former aide to congressman William Dawson and aspirant to the City Council.

Following Orders

In ticking off the busy schedule of a man aspiring to political office, Bowen neglected to include his duties as a county aide. When asked about this supposed full-time job he said, "I do his [Harvey's] legwork. I do whatever he tells me to do."

Harvey's other \$944-a-month aide for the last four years is William D. Parker, owner of Majestic Construction Company until the federal government recently began an investigation into charges of shoddy rehabilitation work performed by the firm under a federally subsidized program. The case is now being studied for possible prosecution.

Holding down two jobs as a public payroller is nothing new to Parker, a flashy dresser and fast talker who skillfully dodges questions about his latest business ventures by joking, "business is bad now."

Held Second Job

He was discharged from the Chicago Police Department in 1959 for conduct unbecoming a policeman for holding down a second job distributing vending machines.

Harvey is one of the few commissioners with the luxury of two administrative aides in addition to a secretary. He claims he needs both men because "I just don't have enough time in the day for all my county business. They do the legwork for me, so I have time to be available to the people. They have to do what I tell them, I'm the leader."

Harvey is having trouble juggling his time between county duties and the aldermanic obligations he has taken on since 2d Ward Ald. Fred Hubbard disappeared last May.

\$100,000 Missing

Hubbard is now under indictment in the disappearance of \$100,000 in Chicago Plan funds while he was executive director of the program.

"Hubbard's not here, you



Commissioner Charles F. Chaplin: "How could I live on a commissioner's salary alone?"

know, so I have to perform his duties," said Harvey, acting 2d Ward committeeman and a former alderman for 20 years. Altho he's not an attorney, Harvey said these duties include "helping the people and going to court for them."

The former insurance operator said he remains in his county office each morning until noon and then tries to get out and "do some of the legwork that has to be done." This includes unannounced visits to County Hospital to check on their operation, he said, but he later reported that investigations are done by his aides.

Other commissioners also claim their county and political work are intertwined and insist that as elected officials they are on the job 24 hours a day.

"There's always desk work

to do" said Ruby Ryan. "And there's always political work. We do that, of course. How else do you think we got our jobs? There's always some sort of meeting. That's politics," she said.

Minutes later she was rushing off to one of those lunches flanked by her administrative aide, Charles Perlongo, a \$944-a-month license supervisor for the county liquor commission. Perlongo sandwiches his investigative assignments for the Liquor Commission between his chauffeuring of Mrs. Ryan.

Politics Takes Time

Floyd T. Fulle, chairman of the suburban Republican organization and Maine Township Republican committeeman, estimates he spends 90 per cent of his time on political work.

"You just can't separate the political stuff from the county work," he said.

Fulle leaves his county offices each day at about 2 p. m. and spends Tuesdays at the Schiller Park office of the newspaper he publishes, the Suburban Progress Weekly.

Fulle claims to put in a lot of time on county matters, "other than 9 to 5 because I'm interested in it," and praises the assistance of his son, Talbert, who is his \$944-a-month administrative aide.

Difficult Transition

Republican commissioner Joseph I. Woods had trouble making the transition from the grueling schedule of sheriff to the more leisurely schedule of a county commissioner. He now operates a polygraph firm under his own name and per-



Commissioner Mathew W. Bieszcza: "I have a policy never to talk to reporters."

forms lie tests whenever his customers require them.

"I don't think this is an eight-hour job," said Woods, whose administrative aide, David Hicks, was undersheriff when Woods was sheriff.

There Every Day

But many commissioners steadfastly maintain they wrap their other activities around their full-time jobs for the county.

Charles Bonk owns and operates the Lesniak Roofing and

Sheet Company where he checks in each morning to see the crews off and late every afternoon to clean up the day's work.

John P. Touhy, former state legislator for 22 years, spends his late afternoons at McKay Contractors, where he is business representative. He also owns nearly half the company's stock.

And the Charles Grupp doesn't spend much time in his county office, he claims to fulfill many of his responsibilities in his Chicago Heights law office where he bases his "part-time practice."

Frank Chesrow is active in his family's real estate businesses. William N. Erickson, the 37-year veteran county board member, ran a laundry business for much of his career and now serves as director of a savings and loan association and an insurance company.

But perhaps the best insight into the life of a county commissioner came from Mrs. Lillian Piotrowski, a former state legislator and committeewoman of the 27th Ward. She said she devotes her time to visiting Oak Forest Hospital, the zoo, and county-run golf courses to chat with visitors and sometimes check on their operation.

"And I just love to go to the forest preserves in the summer and stand at the entrance and welcome people. I tell them how happy we are to have them. Sometimes, I'll walk around and I'll see a child playing ball and I'll pick up the ball and throw it out for him."

Tomorrow: How millions are wasted on loafing county highway workers.