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Quinn uses private cell phone for work

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Gov. Pat Quinn uses his own BlackBerry for government business, saying it saves taxpayers the cost of providing an official cell phone. The practice also allows the governor to avoid public records laws.

By using his own phone, Quinn can make official calls and conduct business by e-mail without having to disclose any of his activities under the Freedom of Information Act.

The Democratic governor won't voluntarily release phone records for his private BlackBerry.

"His personal cell phone/BB (BlackBerry) usage is not public, so those records do not have to be released,"

Quinn spokesman Bob Reed said in an e-mail response to questions from The Associated Press.

Reed said the governor "occasionally" uses his BlackBerry for work calls and "rarely" uses the e-mail on it to conduct state business. The governor uses a personal e-mail address on his Blackberry and there are no other state-issued cell phones or BlackBerries the governor uses, he said.

Quinn promised to improve government transparency when he replaced ousted Gov. Rod Blagojevich in January, and watchdog groups say Quinn's private phone use is worrisome.

"This is vintage Pat Quinn, doing something in his own quirky way that in this case blurs the line between transparency and privacy in a way that's hard to resolve," said Andy Shaw, executive director of the Better Government Association.

Don Craven, interim director of the Illinois Press Association, argued that Quinn's personal device could complicate matters if he uses it to conduct state business that later ends up in litigation.

Quinn defends his decision not to use a government phone and not to release records from the private phone.

"Well, the BlackBerry belongs to me and I pay for the use of it, exclusively. The taxpayers don't pay for



it," he said.

The governor, however, did rely on a state-issued BlackBerry for part of his trip last month to visit Illinois troops in Iraq and Afghanistan because his personal BlackBerry wouldn't work, Reed said.

Craven, an attorney specializing in First Amendment issues, agreed that nothing in the law requires Quinn to release the records for his private BlackBerry, a hand-held electronic device for making calls, reading e-mail and surfing the Internet.

But Cara Smith, deputy chief of staff for Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan, said there is a "strong policy argument" that phone records and e-mails regarding state business done on private devices are subject to freedom of information laws.

Keeping tabs on politicians through public records, including the telephone numbers called on a state phone, helps to maintain public confidence, said Kent Redfield, professor emeritus of political science at the University of Illinois at Springfield. He said such attention doesn't undermine officials' ability to do their job because the public doesn't get to hear the conversations.

"The fact that people are going to know who you are talking to shouldn't have an impact. You should be able to explain why you are talking to people," Redfield said.

Quinn isn't the only leader to face questions about his BlackBerry.

President Barack Obama only got to keep his cherished BlackBerry after security and records-keeping issues were worked out, including limiting its use to keep in touch with senior staff and a small circle of personal friends.

Quinn took office in January when lawmakers removed Blagojevich from office after his arrest on federal corruption charges. Blagojevich did not have a state cell phone or BlackBerry, according to Quinn's office.

Critics said Quinn could release the parts of his personal records that deal with state business or simply avoid any confusion by switching to an official phone.

"For state calls he should be using a state resource," said David Morrison, deputy director of the Illinois Campaign for Political Reform.

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