

Bernard Schoenburg: Three sons of longtime union leader on city payroll

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JIM McGRATH, a politically active longtime Springfield union leader, now has three sons on the Springfield city payroll.

MIKE McGRATH, 49, was hired this spring as an administrative assistant at the City, Water, Light and Power general office. He makes \$43,000 annually.

Also working in city government are his brothers, GERALD "PAT" McGRATH, a painting foreman who makes \$69,181 annually, and DAVID McGRATH, a \$66,061-a-year painter with traffic engineering. Pat has been with the city since 1981, and David since 1990.

Jim McGrath spent more than three decades as business representative for Painters Local 90. He also was a trustee of the Springfield Metro Sanitary District and served a stint as assistant director of the state Department of Labor.

A nephew of the brothers, KELLY McGRATH, has been with the city since 2004. He makes \$34,794 annually as a janitor at CWLP's property management center.

Mike McGrath had been with the state since 1976. According to state records, he left the attorney general's office at an annual salary of \$66,396 last fall and received a lump sum from the state for \$21,343 in unused vacation and sick time.

McGrath was let go as part of staff reductions forced by former Gov. ROD BLAGOJEVICH's cuts, said ROBYN ZIEGLER, spokeswoman for the attorney general. He had been director of office services, running the mailroom, supervising maintenance staff, and dealing with building operational issues in Springfield. His position has not been filled, she said.

BILL O'ROURKE, executive assistant to CWLP general manager TODD RENFROW, said McGrath was hired as an at-will employee at CWLP. There was "not really" an application process, O'Rourke said.

"He was available," O'Rourke said. "We had a need."

O'Rourke said he thinks McGrath started as a temporary employee and then was brought on full time. About 25 CWLP positions are vacant, and only a couple of those are to be filled, O'Rourke said, but nobody was doing exactly what McGrath is now doing as an administrative assistant in the general office.

Projects on the table include seeking a secondary water source, trying to improve security, issues involving the new power plant and seeking annexations near the lake.

"Todd felt the need that we have someone come in and help us do the things that we face every day," O'Rourke said.

So, does the hiring of Mike McGrath make it seem like there's patronage going on? O'Rourke said he didn't want to comment on that.

Not an endorsement

Well, at least the picture was nice. But a Democratic candidate for Illinois comptroller has pulled back on trying to get too much mileage out of it.

RAJA KRISHNAMOORTHY of Hoffman Estates volunteered as issues director of President BARACK OBAMA's 2004 run for U.S. Senate, and he recently got to meet with the president in the Oval Office.

A recent e-mail from Krishnamoorthi included a photo of him with Obama and called it a "treasured photograph."

A follow-up e-mail last week had Krishnamoorthi backpedaling.

"I would like to make clear that the picture was not intended to convey an endorsement by the President," Krishnamoorthi wrote.

"For the purpose of clarification, the White House did not direct or authorize the use of the photo in the way it was utilized, and the President will not be making an endorsement in this race."

Krishnamoorthi said later he had received clearance from the White House to share the picture with the press. He said he wrote the second e-mail after reporters kept asking if it was an endorsement and after "ongoing discussions about the use of the photo" with the Obama administration.

Krishnamoorthi said he got a big hug from Obama during the visit, and he found the president to be "the same man that I used to talk to over a dining room table 10 years ago."

Also in the mix for the Democratic nomination for comptroller is state Rep. DAVID MILLER, D-Lynwood.

Miller wasn't concerned about Krishnamoorthi being photographed with the president.

"I've known the president a long time," said Miller, who served in the General Assembly with Obama. "I first met Michelle Robinson (now the nation's first lady) and was over at Barack's house." When he saw Obama at an event in Chicago, Miller said, Obama asked about Miller's two sons.

What really matters, Miller said, is "what are you going to do for the people."

Miller and I share the experience of growing up in Evanston and being coached in wrestling by ELIAS GEORGE, a giant in the sport, at Evanston Township High School.

"It teaches you discipline," Miller said of losing weight and using "all the techniques and leverage and smarts" to face off against opponents on the mat. He called George "a tremendous influence" and "a figure that transcends."

Couldn't agree more. One of George's daughters, PAT SCOTT, lives in Springfield and says her folks are doing great.

Good news in this very small state.

Interesting field for Dems

The Democratic race for U.S. Senate has gotten more interesting with the entry of DAVID HOFFMAN into the contest. Hoffman, 42, quit as the city of Chicago's inspector general to make the race.

The primary field already includes Illinois Treasurer ALEXI GIANNOULIAS and CHERYLE JACKSON, president of the Chicago Urban League.

Hoffman hasn't been shy about criticizing the administration of Chicago Mayor RICHARD DALEY, which creates an interesting dynamic.

At last week's Governor's Day events surrounding the state fair, Giannoulas was the only candidate there as a Democrat seeking the U.S. Senate nomination. Jackson, asked Wednesday why she didn't make it downstate for that event, said, "I'm not an official candidate." Still, she said she is "100 percent in."

There has been a bit of interesting discussion of who has the common touch in the race, to this point, as Jackson seems to want to capitalize on herself being from modest means and Giannoulas coming from a family that owns a bank.

Giannoulas, responding last week to such talk, said his parents were immigrants and he would "vehemently disagree" with the idea that he can't understand working people's problems.

Jackson isn't doing badly these days. Her annual salary at the Urban League is \$175,000. Her husband, CHARLES, is executive director of the Illinois Environmental Council and is paid in the \$80,000 range.

Jackson also thinks she can keep herself from being linked too closely to her former boss, ex-Gov. Blagojevich. She notes she left the administration after three years and fought Blagojevich's gross receipts tax idea, and her organization sued the state to try to achieve fairer school funding.

Hoffman isn't well known, but he is a former prosecutor, has been a law clerk for then-Chief Justice WILLIAM REHNQUIST of the U.S. Supreme Court, and was captain of the rugby team at Yale University. He was also on Gov. PAT QUINN's reform commission.

The primary is Feb. 2.

Meanwhile, congratulations to Giannoulas, 33, who is engaged to TARA FLOCCO of Chicago.

"He popped the question, I think, a couple weeks ago," said spokesman SCOTT BURNHAM. Flocco lives in Chicago and works in marketing. Giannoulas and Flocco have been dating for a few years, Burnham said.

Democrat Day at UIS

MATTHEW VAN VOSSAN, a junior at the University of Illinois Springfield and president of college Democrats on campus, says a campus Democrat Day will be held from 6 p.m. to midnight Saturday. Voter registration will be available and the music group The Backliners will perform starting at 7:30 p.m. Candidates have been invited and State Rep. MIKE BOLAND, D-East Moline, a candidate for lieutenant governor, has said he plans to attend.

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