

Tax Hike Supporters Land County Jobs

June 8, 2011



CHICAGO—Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle has earned high marks for cleaning up county government in her first few months on the job. But a pair of recent job hires might make you wonder if old-fashioned patronage politics still has a place at the County building.

“You know, we’re looking everywhere we can for qualified people who are interested in public service,” said Preckwinkle, but she didn’t have to look very

hard to find John O'Sullivan and Michael Carberry.

Both are residents of south suburban Oak Lawn, both are connected to the powerful 19th Ward, and both served short, temporary stints in the Illinois Legislature last year, handpicked by Democratic committeemen to fill in for state representatives who resigned in the middle of their terms.

And both voted for that controversial 66 percent income tax hike that passed on the final day of the session by the tiniest of margins.

O'Sullivan said there was "absolutely" never any mention of quid pro quo in exchange for his vote. And now that he's no longer a state representative, he's got a brand new job as regional superintendent of the Cook County Forest Preserve system, making \$85,000 a year.

Forest Preserve Superintendent Arnold Randall said O'Sullivan's resume was sent to him by Preckwinkle's office.

"Political considerations don't have a role for me at all," Randall said. "The bottom line is you do your job or you don't. If you don't do the job, we're gonna make a change."

Just as O'Sullivan was getting his county job, so was his former legislative colleague Michael Carberry, who landed a deputy director's job in the County's Department of Facilities Management at nearly \$100,000 a year.

"He's a person who was interviewed by several of our staff members, and all agreed he was a really talented person, and we brought him onboard in Facilities," said Preckwinkle.

Better Government Association Executive Director Andy Shaw said you'd have to be a pretty big believer in coincidences not to see the politics here.

"It sounds like a couple of guys went down to Springfield, did the bidding of the party to pass the tax hike, and as a result they're awarded with jobs in Cook County," Shaw said. "This sounds like business as usual and on its face it's troubling."

Even more troubling is the fact that O'Sullivan was fired by Cook County after the county's inspector general found he had been falsifying his time card while

working as a laborer at Stroger Hospital. O'Sullivan appealed the firing and got his job back. He said he was framed for not supporting Todd Stroger.

"Retaliation from that administration is what brought upon these bogus charges. Unproved on all the charges. And I received full back pay and benefits," said O'Sullivan.

But Inspector General Pat Blanchard told us he stands by his finding that O'Sullivan was ripping off taxpayers. Preckwinkle said she never considered that allegation before awarding O'Sullivan with a plum county job.

"My understanding is this matter was adjudicated and he was restored to his position," said Preckwinkle.

As for Carberry, he said he didn't want to go on camera, but he said he's more than qualified for the county job.