

Ex-Gov. Ryan denied pension

High court rules he's not entitled to any funds following his corruption conviction

February 19, 2010 | By Ray Long, Tribune reporters

SPRINGFIELD — Ex-Gov. George Ryan won't get to collect his state [pension](#) as he sits in an Indiana federal prison, a decision his attorney former Gov. Jim Thompson called "deeply disappointing" because the once-affable cigar-smoking old-school Republican "has nothing."

But Ryan already has raked in \$635,000 from Illinois [taxpayers](#) in the three-plus years between his retirement and his major political corruption conviction, a top pension official said. Ryan also got a refund of \$235,500 when his pension was taken away — the amount of personal contributions he made during his more than 30 years in public [office](#).

The pension [payments](#) run counter to the sympathetic image Thompson is trying to cultivate for Ryan, who turns 76 on Wednesday, faces at least three more years in prison and is hoping [President Barack Obama](#) will grant his request for freedom.

There was only a smattering of sympathy from the Illinois Supreme Court, which announced Friday that Ryan is not entitled to any of his pension. Thompson argued that Ryan should get about \$71,000 from the nearly \$200,000-a-year pension that was revoked — credit for the years Ryan served in office before a lengthy federal investigation into his tenure as [secretary of state](#) and governor.

Justice Robert Thomas wrote the 6-1 decision against Ryan, calling him a politician who transformed two of the state's highest [offices](#) into "an ongoing and wholly self-serving criminal enterprise."

"As the victims of Ryan's crimes, the taxpayers of the state of Illinois are under no obligation to now fund his retirement," Thomas wrote.

Justice Anne Burke, the lone dissenter, who favored Ryan getting some of his pension back.

"I would conclude there is a connection between the felonies and Ryan's position as governor and [secretary](#) of state," Burke wrote. But "there is no such connection between the felonies and Ryan's position in the General Assembly or as lieutenant governor. ... Without such nexus, there is no basis to disqualify Ryan from receiving those benefits related to these positions."

Robyn Zielger, spokeswoman for [Attorney General](#) Lisa Madigan, said the ruling confirms "that public officials cannot be allowed to benefit from conduct that violates the public trust."

Ryan was found guilty in April 2006 of steering state contracts and leases, including a \$25 million IBM computer deal, to political insiders. In return, he got luxury vacations and collected gifts.

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