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## Former Illinois Governor Ryan enters prison

Reuters Staff



CHICAGO (Reuters) - Former Illinois Gov. George Ryan entered a federal prison in Wisconsin on Wednesday to begin serving a 6-1/2 year sentence for corruption, proclaiming his innocence to the end.

Ryan, 73, and family members arrived by car at a minimum security facility in Oxford, Wisconsin, about midday, witnesses said, 24 hours after his last-ditch appeal to the Supreme Court to remain free on bail was turned down.

“As I have said since the beginning of this 10-year ordeal, I am innocent,” he told reporters earlier. His lawyers, including another former Illinois governor, Jim Thompson, said they would try to get the high court to consider an appeal.

Ryan has been nominated several times for a Nobel Peace Prize because of his opposition to the death penalty. In 2000 he ordered a moratorium on executions in Illinois after 13 death row inmates were found to have been wrongly convicted.

Before leaving office in 2003, Ryan emptied the state’s death row, commuting the sentences of 167 inmates to life in prison and becoming a hero to foes of capital punishment. The moratorium he imposed still stands.

Ryan and lobbyist Larry Warner were convicted in 2006 of 18 counts of racketeering, conspiracy, fraud and other offenses involving favoritism and kickbacks for state contracts and property leases that prosecutors said enriched Ryan and his friends while he was governor.

A Republican, Ryan won a single four-year term as governor in 1998 before retiring amid a bribery scandal rooted in his years as secretary of state and involving employees of his office who sold truck drivers' licenses.

The scandals paved the way for Democrats to regain the Illinois governor's seat for the first time in more than a quarter century with Rod Blagojevich's election in 2002. Blagojevich won a second term in 2006. (Reporting by Michael Conlon; editing by Vicki Allen)

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