

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

www.suntimes.com

[Back to regular view](#)

<http://www.suntimes.com/output/marin/cst-edt-carol29.html>

[Print this page](#)

Clout seems to suit Victor Reyes just fine

March 29, 2006

BY [CAROL MARIN](#) SUN-TIMES COLUMNIST

SPRINGFIELD -- When I came to Springfield this week, I didn't expect some of my time would be spent chasing Victor Reyes through the rotunda of the state Capitol. But there he was and there I was running after him.

Reyes, as you no doubt know, is a man who understands a lot about power. And one who prefers to wield it quietly, away from prying reporters, and certainly out of the view of cameras. He was that way back in 1996 when he ran Mayor Daley's Office of Intergovernmental Affairs and he remains that way today as federal investigators conduct their ever widening probe of corruption within that office, an investigation that has resulted in the indictments of some of Reyes' former colleagues.

Me? I just had a couple of questions about a bill up for a vote in the Senate this week. And about how Reyes' new lobbying firm, The Roosevelt Group, had managed to guarantee that its clients would be exempt from any of the restrictions the legislation would impose.

Would he stop and talk to me, I asked?

"I'll give you a call," said Reyes, walking away quickly.

Could he just chat with me a little now?

"You'll have to let me give you a call," he said, still moving at a brisk clip.

Not even a quick answer to a simple question?

"I'll have to give you a call." And with that, he was out the door and out of sight.

I wish I could say that my inquiry was about some big, hot, investigative scoop. But it wasn't.

One of the reasons I was in Springfield was to follow a story that I began a year ago. It's about senior citizens who are trying to find decent, affordable housing and how that's getting harder and harder.

Some of them, a good 300,000 in Illinois, live in what we used to call "trailer parks" or "mobile homes." These days, we call them "manufactured home communities." And in fact, the houses in question are neither trailers nor mobile. They are simply pre-fab, affordable living units that cost less than traditionally built homes.

The irony of this kind of home ownership is that while the house is theirs, the plot of land on which it sits is not. Most of the 2000 manufactured home communities in Illinois are controlled by big, nationwide outfits. The largest, a public company, is run by Chicago zillionaire Sam Zell.

Zell is affectionately known as "the Grave Dancer" because he buys poor performing companies and makes them hugely profitable.

Then again, some other manufactured home communities are owned by a consortium of private firms that fly under the banner of the Illinois Housing Institute. They are Reyes' clients.

In a kind of David and Goliath way, the senior citizens who live in these communities have in recent years been fighting against skyrocketing rents that are causing them to abandon the homes they own. They're forced to sign them over to the companies that own the land because they're just too expensive to maintain.

Tuesday in Springfield, bus loads of those residents, a few in wheelchairs and walkers, converged on the Capitol to ask for some modest relief in the form of House Bill 5377. In its original form, it would have forced both Zell and the companies Reyes represents to offer two-year leases to residents as a way of slowing down their rising rents.

But if the legislation had a prayer of passing, it was clear that compromises would have to be made. State Rep. Ruth Munson (R-Elgin), the primary sponsor, fought hard to keep it from being watered down but lost to the clout of Reyes' group. By the time the bill got to the floor, only "public" companies like Zell's were covered in the legislation. "Private" firms, like the ones Reyes represented, were exempt.

Now, we can save our tears for Zell. He's richer than God and threatening to use some of his cash to tie this bill up in court, claiming it's unconstitutional.

But at the same time, the reason I was chasing Reyes down the marble hallways of the Capitol was to ask how he managed to liberate his own clients from the proposed legislation.

One of Reyes' lobbying partners did in fact call me and claimed that their clients were, in essence, the good guys in the industry who didn't need to come under the authority of this new law.

But it's Reyes I still really want to talk to. Despite the heat of the ongoing federal investigation that identifies him as "Individual A" and a "co-schemer" in a felonious City Hall patronage operation, Reyes has not been charged.

And, hey, he's hardly out of business.

Armed with a Blackberry and an excellent blue suit, it sure looked to me like business as usual in the corridors of clout.

Copyright © The Sun-Times Company

All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten, or redistributed.