



The

Challenge

March 2000



Marockie still target of probes

State Schools Superintendent Hank Marockie finally released 50 pages of an estimated 4,000 detailing how he spent \$8,433 of the more than \$99,000 he received from the Education Alliance, but it didn't do much to enhance his reputation.

The documents released in late February show Marockie used the secretary's discretionary fund to pay for meals with state school board members and Senate Education chairman Lloyd Jackson, D-Lin-

coln. He bought flowers for funerals of his employees' relatives, Christmas candy for office secretaries, got a first-class upgrade on a plane flight and was reimbursed for dinners with his wife, who works at a regional education service agency (RESA) in Wheel-



Marockie

ing, according to reports in *The Charleston Gazette*.

The Gazette, which received the 50 pages after filing a Freedom of Information Act, reported the records showed Marockie charged the Education Alliance for mileage while driving his state-owned car. On three occasions, the superintendent charged the Alliance for meetings in one city while the state reimbursed him for travel costs in another location on the same day.

Marockie continues to

refuse to release any spending records before 1996.

A majority of state Senate Education Committee members had called for Marockie to release documents showing how he spent the Education Alliance funds.

And some senators are calling for Marockie to resign immediately, instead of waiting until June 30, his announced retirement date, after stories in *Education Week* and other education publications reported on the aftermath of the superintendent's failed efforts to land a plum job in Las Vegas, Nev.

"It's been an embarrassment for West Virginia," Sen. Donna Boley, R-Pleasants, told *The Gazette's* Eric Eyre. "Dr. Marockie has embarrassed West Virginia nationwide. He's leaving June 30. Why not go now and let us have a superintendent we can look up to and respect."

In December, Marockie was one of two finalists to head the Clark County, Nev., school district, the nation's eighth largest school system and one of the fastest-growing.

In interviews with Nevada officials, Marockie inflated his West Virginia sal-

State Board's top pick for schools superintendent lacks qualifications

The West Virginia Board of Education's top choice for state schools superintendent is a former Illinois associate superintendent who doesn't meet the state's minimum qualifications and who once had a state employee work on his wedding invitations, according to a report in *The Charleston Gazette*.

Richard Laine also used money earmarked for academic programs to pay \$35,500 for office furniture and \$43,000 for computer equipment, the newspaper said.

The news about Laine

came after a closed-door selection process during which the state School Board interviewed four candidates in a 15th-floor suite of the Charleston Marriott.

The Gazette's Eric Eyre reported that in 1998 an interim Illinois state schools superintendent cut Laine's pay and demoted him to an advisory position.

"If Richard has a drawback, it would be his management style," Eyre was told by Bob Mandeville, the former Illinois state schools interim superintendent.

However, Mandeville described Laine as intelli-

gent, innovative and well-spoken. He said Laine had been thrust into a difficult job at the young age of 34.

"If you want someone to be a spokesman for your school system, Richard would be excellent," Mandeville told Eyre.

"I felt he had to mature a bit before he was ready for a top job."

State school board member J. D. Morris told Eyre that Laine assured them a state employee worked on his wedding invitations on her lunch hour

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Challenge West Virginia

The Challenge is published by Challenge West Virginia, a statewide organization committed to maintaining and improving small community schools and reforming education policy in West Virginia so that all of our state's children have the opportunity to receive a first-class education and the promise of a bright future.

Challenge members believe state education policy, which has resulted in the closing of a fourth of West Virginia's schools during the past ten years, does not serve the best interest of many children, especially those from low-income families who live in rural areas.

Challenge West Virginia is a program of Covenant House, an independent, non-profit organization in Charleston, WV, which is not connected to any other program by the same name.

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This 'n that from around the state

• Monongalia County voters overwhelmingly rejected an \$80 million school bond which would have financed the construction of ten new schools and renovations to eleven others. Seventy-two percent of voters said no to the bond, the largest ever presented to county voters in West Virginia.



On the same day, voters in Marion County rejected a \$29.7 million school bond by a three to one margin and Wyoming County voters approved a \$7 million bond.

The Marion County bond would have built a new Fairmont Senior High School and completed North Marion High with the addition of a new gymnasium.

The Wyoming county bond will help fund a new consolidated high school that will combine Baileysville and Oceana high schools.

• The Lincoln County Board of Education rejected a proposal to consolidate the county's four high schools into one school. The Board instead approved a plan to keep all four high schools intact. Board member Billie Frye said her decision was based on long school bus times for students.

• Harrison County fellow Paul Hambrick says the state can actually save money by building small schools. He estimates that a 1,000-enrollment school, based on an 80 square foot allowance multiplied by \$82 a square foot, would cost \$6,560,000. On the

other hand, a 600-student school, following the same formula, would cost \$3,936,000. And a 400-student school would cost \$2,634,000.

• The Harrison County Board of Education became the second county school board to endorse Challenge WV's Better Schools Bill. The McDowell County board had previously endorsed the bill.

• A bill in the West Virginia legislature would give counties the opportunity to extend the time school can be in session. The bill calls for school to start no earlier than Aug. 15 and no later than June 30. It also would eliminate a section of law that requires the state board of education to check air conditioning in each county's schools if the county want to have school past June 1. The bill is an attempt to ensure that students get a full 178 days of instruction time and counties have the flexibility to make sure weather-related school closures can be made up.

• Kanawha County, which is in the midst of a large-scale school consolidation project, has added five high school gymnasiums to the May 9 bond issue. The gyms will cost \$3.5 million, bringing the bond to \$27.5 million.

• A resolution introduced in the State Senate proposes the election of state school board members. Currently, state board members are appointed by the governor and serve for nine years. The resolution calls for nine board members to be elected to six-year terms with three members from each of the state's three congressional districts.

Probes continue into Marockie spending

ary and refused to provide specifics about expense-account funds, according to Ruth Johnson, president of the Clark County board during the search.

Although Marockie denies providing erroneous information, Clark County board members say he told them he earned a salary of \$146,000 and received a housing allowance and country club memberships. In fact, Marockie earned \$100,000 a year and did not receive the housing allowance or club memberships.

When Marockie's claims reached West Virginia, investigations were launched into the superintendent's use of the little-known "superintendent's discretionary fund," set up by the non-profit West Virginia Education Alliance to pay for Marockie's incidental expenditures.

The Education Alliance receives money from utilities, private foundations and some of the largest corporations in the state.

Most State Board of Education members said they had no knowledge about the fund until reading about it in newspaper accounts. The U.S. Attorney's office, the legislative Commission on Special Investigations and the Kanawha County prosecutor's of-

fice have launched investigations. The state Board of Education has had a series of meetings with Marockie concerning the fund.

Education Alliance officials told Eyre Marockie "strayed" from the original intended purpose of the fund from 1992 to 1994 when he submitted expenses averaging more than \$19,000 a year. The account, set up to pay travel expenses for students and teachers, was eliminated in July.

"Dr. Marockie's expenses were not always consistent with the fund's purpose," Vivian Owens, the organization's executive director at the time, told Eyre.

Eyre also discovered that in addition to the Alliance funds, Marockie has billed the state for \$85,000 in travel expenses over the past six years, including hundreds of trips from the Capitol to downtown Charleston, most often at lunchtime or after work.

Education Alliance leaders have promised to make Marockie's expense documents public provided the superintendent releases them of liability, Eyre reported.

To date, Marockie has declined to sign the release, saying it would be inappropriate for him to interfere with

the review process.

State Board members originally pledged unanimous support for Marockie, but some have begun to express concerns. After a Feb. 18 meeting, board members told Eyre they have "considerable concern" about the superintendent and will continue to monitor his "employment, leadership and performance."

Board members said they questioned Marockie about his relationship with the Legislature and the governor's office.

While some senators, including Jackson, agreed with Marockie that the documents should only be released after investigators conclude their probe, most felt the superintendent should make everything public.

"As a public official, you shouldn't be hiding anything," said Sen. Larry Edgell, D-Wetzel. "Everything he does should be in the public domain. Public officials are public officials."

Added Sen. Homer Ball, D-Mercer, "There is an appearance of a conflict of interest here. We have to report what lobbyists give us. Dr. Marockie is a statewide public official."

Questions raised about superintendent candidate

as a personal favor. Morris said he was not aware Illinois legislators had criticized Laine for buying office furniture with academic money.

Eyre reported that Laine now works for the Illinois Business Roundtable, a non-profit group that coordinates "an aggressive agenda" by the business community to improve education.

West Virginia's minimum qualifications for the state superintendent are five years of experience in public school work and a master's degree in educational administration.

Laine worked four years for the Illinois Board of Education. He has a master's in business administration

and public policy from the University of Chicago, where he is pursuing a doctorate in education.

"It clearly tells us he's not qualified," Tom Lange, president of the West Virginia Education Association, told Eyre. "It's critical for the person who's the chief education officer in our state to have been in the classrooms and schools and to have a clear understanding of education. He has no experience in the classroom or teaching. There's a big question mark on this one."

Morris told Eyre school board members had suggested changes in the superintendent's salary and qualifications before they met Laine.

"Certainly we would not employ someone who could not be certified as superintendent of schools," he said. "We're in the negotiation process."

State School Board members have narrowed their list of candidates for the post to four. They have said they intend to spend about \$50,000 on their search.

Part of that money was paid for a Boston-based consulting firm to lead the search, according to *Gazette* reports. Plane trips, meals and hotel rooms for candidates also have been paid at taxpayer expense.

But parents, teachers and students

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Superintendent candidate

did not get to participate in the process. All interviews were closed to the public.

Representatives from West Virginia's two teacher groups criticized the state board for leaving them out.

"They ought not really do these things behind closed doors," Bob Brown, a national American Federation of Teachers representative based in Charleston, told the *Gazette's* Eyre. "We're talking about public money."

State board members responded that teachers, business leaders and service workers had a chance to participate in the search be-

fore it began when an advisory committee drew up the job qualifications.

But Kym Randolph, spokeswoman for the West Virginia Education Association, said her group has been upset from the beginning.

"After the advisory committee, teachers and other folks were excluded from the entire process."

Challenge West Virginia's Beth Spence added, "This is the story of education in West Virginia. The people most involved – parents, teachers and students – are almost always left out of the process."