

tigation revealed that Colavita has worked himself into the processes of both the legislative and executive branches of the county government to an extent that makes him a de facto official of that government.

Commission inquiries over the past two and a half years have revealed that local governments throughout the State are often dominated by party leaders who are not elected by or accountable to the voters. In Westchester County, the Commission found a graphic illustration of this reality. In making recommendations, the Commission takes into account the inherent symbiotic relationship between leaders of government and the political parties from which they emerge, but at the same time seeks to eliminate practices which needlessly foster the perception that access to government may be obtained by making contributions to particular parties. In short, the reforms sought are aimed at drawing clearer lines of distinction between the political and governmental structures where appropriate and possible, and, to the extent that divisions are not feasible, making party leaders more accountable under the law for the influence they exercise.

In response to revelations made at the Commission's public hearings in November, 1989, County Executive Andrew O'Rourke has indicated that he will propose several

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COMMENTARY

O'Rourke hears or sees no evil

It is amazing how much stuff Andrew O'Rourke doesn't care about, hasn't cared about and probably will never care about.

In this regard, the state Commission on Government Integrity's report, released yesterday, is most instructive on the county executive's priorities, his goals, his extraordinary disinterests.

O'Rourke, for instance, hasn't cared that his payroll has long been a job bank for unemployed (and, in some cases, unemployable) Republicans. The commission's report recounts a time early in O'Rourke's tenure when then-County Clerk George Morrow approached him about appointment of several deputies. O'Rourke, the elected GOP county executive, responded by saying that "jobs of that status have to be cleared through Tony."

Tony is, of course, Anthony Colavita of Eastchester, the county Republican chairman, the man who could apparently tell the county executive what to do and whom to hire. As O'Rourke predicted, Colavita was helpful, telling Morrow the jobs would be filled with people recommended by the Republican Party, and that Morrow would be endorsed for re-election if he went along with the recommendations.

O'Rourke seemed not to care that, by referring people to Colavita, he was surrendering a portion of his duties to an unelected political strategist.

EX "V-3"

Colavita the boss

O'Rourke seemed not to care that Colavita was running much of the government he was elected to oversee. When Andrew Spano — a Democrat — was elected county clerk and needed to protect his budgets, he went to Colavita for help, not to O'Rourke. In testimony before the commission last November in White Plains, Spano said, "The reality in Westchester seemed to be that he (Colavita) had input into the entire process."

In one case, Spano told Colavita that he, the Republican chairman, could fill five jobs in the clerk's office if a total of 10 jobs were restored to his budget. The jobs were restored, according to sworn testimony, and Colavita filled half of them.

O'Rourke didn't care, apparently, that Colavita virtually took over county-owned Playland Amusement Park, squeezing political contributions out of vendors and costing Westchester taxpayers many, many hundreds of thousands of dollars. While Colavita's (and O'Rourke's) man, the notorious E. Richard Keeler, was director of Playland, virtually all vendors made contributions to the Westchester Republicans. Roughly \$80,000 was given directly to the party by 21 of 23 Playland vendors who did business with Keeler and Colavita.

O'Rourke knew, but didn't care, that one of the largest contributors to Colavita's bank accounts — one Morgan "Mickey" Hughes, a New Jersey amusement ride operator — was given a unique Playland contract that eventually cost Westchester taxpayers about \$900,000.

In 1982 when Hughes wanted to inquire about contracts at Playland, he first contacted Colavita's office in Republican headquarters, not O'Rourke's office and not the park. And once Hughes was given those lucrative contracts, he immediately became a generous political contributor, giving more than \$15,000 to Colavita's committees between 1985 and '88.

GOP interests paramount

When word of Hughes' contract, his political contributions and taxpayers' losses became public, O'Rourke assigned a quartet of aides to investigate it. But when the quartet failed to interview anyone involved in the contract's negotiation, requested no records from Keeler or Hughes, and then didn't issue a final report, O'Rourke did nothing. Apparently, he didn't care.

O'Rourke — never known for his energetic lobbying of the county Board of Legislators anyway — didn't seem to mind Colavita's orchestrating board meetings and shaping county budgets. Republican board member Ed Brady told the commission how "at Colavita's insistence," the party boss would go over agendas, item by item, with board members to make sure Republican interests were served in all board decisions.

O'Rourke didn't seem to care much that, as a result of revelations by the press and the commission, public faith in county government had been damaged. He admitted last fall that his administration had a "black eye" as a result of stories and testimony about Playland and Colavita's political machine. He promised to assemble an array of reforms. He promised the appointment of a "working group" in his office to look into political corruption.

As the commission pointed out yesterday, neither the reforms nor the "working group" ever materialized. Again, O'Rourke didn't care.

Tony Brown's column appears Monday, Wednesday and Friday.