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Thompson crony cut from deal

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Nick Hurtgen has walked the plank.

The indicted operative who seems to be in on every deal is out of ex-Gov. **Tommy Thompson's** foray into the radio business.

Apparently, **Armada Media Corp.**, the fledgling radio company of which Thompson is chairman, realized that it would be a lot easier to obtain federal radio licenses without Hurtgen on the team.

The Media Access Project, a D.C. do-gooder group, had filed an objection with federal regulators to Armada's bid to purchase six South Dakota radio stations, a move that could cause a costly delay in the purchase.

"The sole basis of the informal objection was that P. Nicholas Hurtgen, an attributable owner of Armada, is under federal indictment for seven felonies," wrote **Andrew Schwartzman**, head of the non-profit.

Advertisement But this month Armada informed the Federal Communications Commission that Hurtgen is out. Armada provides no details, except that the remaining partners now own larger shares of the company. Hurtgen had owned 12.5%.

"This was straightforward and wide open - it was clearly going to slow things up," Schwartzman said last week. "They didn't have a particularly good explanation for something that was really embarrassing."

Torpedoing Hurtgen must have been particularly painful to Thompson, who almost certainly brought his former aide into the radio deal.

Hurtgen was the top aide to **Jim Klauser**, Thompson's right-hand man. Hurtgen quit his state job in 1995 to become a big-shot exec in the Chicago office of **Bear Stearns**, long known as the Thompson administration's favorite investment banker. So close was the relationship that when **President Bush**

named the Wisconsin governor to his cabinet, Hurtgen and Klauser shepherded him around the Capitol to meet key senators.

In the years since Thompson left for D.C., Hurtgen has worked hard to grease palms on both sides of the aisle. Records show that he hosted fund-raisers for Democratic Gov. **Jim Doyle** and his Republican opponent, U.S. Rep. **Mark Green**, doing so within days of each other in September 2003.

On Sept. 22, 2003, Green attended a Hurtgen-orchestrated fund-raiser at **Petterino's** restaurant in downtown Chicago. Green has since returned \$4,000 each from Hurtgen and his indicted pal **Stuart Levine**, with whom Green met later on the day of the event. On Sept. 29, Hurtgen and two Illinois lobbyists got face time with Doyle by collecting checks for his campaign at political hangout **Gene & Georgetti's**.

But all that was before Hurtgen's world came crashing down last year when a federal grand jury charged him with assisting in a kickback scheme so Bear Stearns would receive the financing work for a hospital construction project in Illinois.

With Hurtgen out of the radio deal, Schwartzman dropped his objection, and the purchase now is expected to sail through the regulatory process. Which might make you think that the folks with Schwartzman's group should be content.

Guess again - these goo-goos are still grumbling.

In the letter withdrawing his objection, Schwartzman fires a salvo at the FCC, saying it still thinks the agency should require applicants to disclose whether they are facing serious charges. Currently, only convictions must be reported.

"MAP considers these policies and practices to be woefully inadequate to protect the public," Schwartzman wrote. He added, "Indeed, it is entirely possible that there are, at this moment, broadcast licensees operating their businesses from jail cells."

But not Hurtgen, even if he is convicted.

Out of the woodwork

State Sen. **Jeff Plale** is finding all kinds of new friends.

Funny how that happens when you're an incumbent who suddenly is all but assured of being re-elected.

The conservative Democrat was lucky enough to have his opponent, **Donovan Riley**, get caught having voted twice in the same election back in 2000. After two weeks of pressure, Riley pulled out of the Democratic primary late Thursday.

But even before that, Team Plale has seen its numbers grow.

The most recent convert: Mayor **Tom Barrett**, who has signed up with the South Milwaukee incumbent's campaign on Wednesday and agreed to help host a Sept. 7 fund-raiser on Brady St. - the heart of Riley's liberal base. Three years ago, Plale knocked off **Joel Brennan**, a longtime Barrett pal and adviser, to win the Senate seat.





















Ald. **Michael D'Amato** will be co-sponsoring the event, though D'Amato threw his support to Plale long before Riley's campaign started disintegrating.

Plale said numerous folks have come up to him in recent days and told him that they've been with him since the get-go.

Said Plale: "It's just been surreal."

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