

Granting Ryan freedom sends wrong message.

A federal appellate court ruled that former Gov. George Ryan can remain free while he appeals his conviction.

While Ryan has every right to an appeal, the court sent the wrong message by taking the unusual step of granting him bond.

It's time for the people of Illinois to start digesting an unsettling possibility - former Gov. George Ryan may never serve prison time for the crimes he committed while in office.

While it's true the federal appellate decision that allows Ryan to remain free on bond during his appeal didn't hint at how the court might rule on his conviction and 6 1/2-year sentence, we need to start bracing ourselves. This could drag on long enough for Ryan to serve out the last days of his life at home rather than in prison.

Obviously, the three-member U.S. 7th Circuit Court of Appeals found something during the Ryan trial that raised red flags. The best guess is that it has something to do with the dismissal and replacement of two jurors during tumultuous deliberations.

We said after Ryan's conviction that U.S. District Judge Rebecca Pallmeyer did a commendable job handling the jury situation and that the appellate court would have to decide whether her actions were fair. The hope here is the higher court still ends up agreeing with Pallmeyer's decision - and soon.

Either way, the appellate ruling buys Ryan more time. At 72, Ryan isn't a picture of good health; all he's looking for at this point is a reprieve.

While he has every right to an appeal, he's currently a guilty man and should be treated that way. ...

The silver lining that the General Assembly Retirement System board cut Ryan off from his \$197,000 annual state pension. Even if he's not going to serve time, at least Ryan won't be able to continue robbing the taxpayers of this state.

Ryan's lawyers promise to file a lawsuit asking the state Supreme Court to review the pension decision, saying Ryan is "out of money."

"Human nature is not to kick someone while they're down, but we have a responsibility," said pension board member Bill Brady, a Republican senator from Bloomington, after voting to revoke Ryan's retirement funds. "We did the right thing for the future of Illinois, to send the message that criminal behavior will be punished."

At least someone is still thinking about the bigger picture.

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