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Phone/Fax:
 (217) 283-9348
 Email:
publish@justthefacts.net

Blagojevich, chief of staff arrested on corruption charges

CHICAGO—Illinois Gov. Rod R. Blagojevich and his Chief of Staff, John Harris, were arrested Tuesday by FBI agents on federal corruption charges alleging that they and others are engaging in ongoing criminal activity: conspiring to obtain personal financial benefits for Blagojevich by leveraging his sole authority to appoint a United States Senator; threatening to withhold substantial state assistance to the Tribune Company in connection with the sale of Wrigley Field to induce the firing of *Chicago Tribune* editorial board members sharply critical of Blagojevich; and to obtain campaign contributions in exchange for official actions – both historically and now in a push before a new state ethics law takes effect January 1, 2009.

Blagojevich, 51, and Harris, 46, both of Chicago, were each charged with conspiracy to commit mail and wire fraud and solicitation of bribery. They were charged in a two-count criminal complaint that was sworn out on Sunday and unsealed today following their arrests, which occurred without incident, announced Patrick J. Fitzgerald, United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois, and Robert D. Grant, Special Agent-in-Charge of the Chicago Office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Both men were expected to appear later

today before U.S. Magistrate Judge Nan Nolan in U.S. District Court in Chicago.

A 76-page FBI affidavit alleges that Blagojevich was intercepted on court-authorized wiretaps during the last month conspiring to sell or trade Illinois' U.S. Senate seat vacated by President-elect Barack Obama for financial and other personal benefits for himself and his wife. At various times, in exchange for the Senate appointment, Blagojevich discussed obtaining:

- a substantial salary for himself at a either a non-profit foundation or an organization affiliated with labor un-

See **BLAGOJEVICH** on other side

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Blagojevich continued from other side

ions;

- placing his wife on paid corporate boards where he speculated she might garner as much as \$150,000 a year;
- promises of campaign funds, including cash up front; and a cabinet post or ambassadorship for himself.

On December 4, Blagojevich allegedly told an advisor that he might “get some (money) up front, maybe” from Senate Candidate 5, if he named Senate Candidate 5 to the Senate seat, to insure that Senate Candidate 5 kept a promise about raising money for Blagojevich if he ran for re-

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election. In a recorded conversation on October 31, Blagojevich claimed he was approached by an associate of Senate Candidate 5 as follows: “We were approached ‘pay to play.’ That, you know, he’d raise 500 grand. An emissary came. Then the other guy would raise a million, if I made him (Senate Candidate 5) a Senator.”

On November 7, while talking on the phone about the Senate seat with Harris and an advisor, Blagojevich said he needed to consider his family and that he is “financially” hurting, the affidavit states. Harris allegedly said that they were considering what would help the “financial security” of the Blagojevich family and what will keep Blagojevich “politically viable.” Blagojevich stated, “I want to make money,” adding later that he is interested in making \$250,000 to \$300,000 a year, the complaint alleges.

On November 10, in a lengthy telephone call with numerous advisors that included discussion about Blagojevich obtaining a lucrative job with a union-affiliated organization in exchange for appointing a particular Senate candidate whom he believed was favored by the President-elect and which is described in more detail below, Blagojevich and others discussed various ways Blagojevich could “monetize” the relationships he has made as governor to make money after leaving that office.

“The breadth of corruption laid out in these charges is staggering,” Fitzgerald said. “They allege that Blagojevich put a ‘for sale’ sign on the naming of a United States Senator; involved himself personally in pay-to-play schemes with the urgency of a salesman meeting his annual sales target; and corruptly used his office in an effort to trample editorial voices of criticism. The citizens of Illinois deserve public officials who act solely in the public’s interest, without putting a price tag on government appointments, contracts and decisions,” he added.

Grant said: “Many, including myself, thought that the recent conviction of a former governor would usher in a new era of honesty and reform in Illinois politics. Clearly, the charges announced today reveal that the office of the Governor has become nothing more than a vehicle for self-enrichment, unrestricted by party affiliation and taking Illinois politics to a new low.”

The probe is part of *Operation Board Games*, a five-

year-old public corruption investigation of pay-to-play schemes, including insider-dealing, influence-peddling and kickbacks involving private interests and public duties. Federal agents today also executed search warrants at the offices of Friends of Blagojevich located at 4147 North Ravenswood, Suite 300, and at the Thompson Center office of Deputy Governor A.


Charges include historical allegations that Blagojevich and Harris schemed with others, including previously convicted defendants Antoin Rezko, Stuart Levine, Ali Ata and others, since becoming governor in 2002 to obtain and attempt to obtain financial benefits for himself, his family and third parties, including his campaign committee, Friends of Blagojevich, in exchange for appointments to state boards and commissions, state employment, state contracts and access to state funds. A portion of the affidavit recounts the testimony of various witnesses at Rezko’s trial earlier this year.

The charges focus on events since October when the government obtained information that Blagojevich and the chairman of Friends of Blagojevich, were accelerating Blagojevich’s allegedly corrupt fund-raising activities to accumulate as much money as possible this year before a new state ethics law would severely curtail Blagojevich’s ability to raise money from individuals and entities that have existing contracts worth more than \$50,000 with the State of Illinois. Agents learned Blagojevich was seeking approximately \$2.5 million in campaign contributions by the end of the year, principally from or through individuals or entities, many of which have received state contacts or appointments, identified on a list maintained by Friends of Blagojevich, which the FBI has obtained.

The public is reminded that defendants are presumed innocent and are entitled to a fair trial at which the government has the burden of proving guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

If convicted, Blagojevich could be the fourth Illinois

Weather



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