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State senate hears Blagojevich wiretap tapes

SPRINGFIELD | Top Dem senator predicts 59-0 vote against gov after hearing secret recordings

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January 27, 2009

BY DAVE MCKINNEY, NATASHA KORECKI AND CHRIS FUSCO Staff Reporters

SPRINGFIELD -- Gov. Blagojevich is a no-show at his impeachment trial, but his voice echoed throughout the ornate Illinois Senate Tuesday as undercover FBI recordings of the governor's alleged shakedown of a campaign donor were played for the first time.

In one of the most dramatic moments of Blagojevich's trial, the recordings showed his 59 senator-jurors how the governor allegedly schemed to extort a racetrack operator for \$100,000 in exchange for signing legislation that would pump millions of dollars into the racing industry.

During a portion of the five minutes of taped conversations, Blagojevich's ex-chief of staff Lon Monk, now a lobbyist, said he got in the "face" of the donor -- racing mogul John Johnston -- about the donation, drawing praise from the governor.

"OK. Good," Blagojevich said, prompting some senators to shake their heads in disbelief. Prosecutors say the governor went on a fund-raising frenzy to beat a Jan. 1 deadline when most big donations from state contractors would be barred under a new ethics law.

The governor's voice silenced the jammed legislative chamber as senators, some leaning in closer, cupped their ears to hear the governor's sometimes-muffled words more clearly.

"It sounds like a couple of organized crime figures out preparing to break some kneecaps. It's just horrible. It's nauseating. It's sickening," said Sen. Dan Cronin (R-Elmhurst).

The recordings were just a snippet of "thousands" of conversations that prosecutors say they secretly recorded. But they marked a key moment in the impeachment trial, where a vote could come as early as Thursday.

Preparing for Blagojevich's possible ouster, Lt. Gov. Pat Quinn plans to be in Springfield Thursday and would immediately take the oath of office if senators vote to remove the governor, Quinn spokesman Bob Reed said.

In one surprise Tuesday, Blagojevich is heard on one recording making a reference to his former fund-raising chief, Chris Kelly, suggesting some level of mistrust had permeated their relationship.

"I feel like there's somebody else who's holding him [Johnston] back" -- an apparent reference to Johnston not yet giving the money to the governor's campaign fund.

Monk replied, "No."

"I believe it's Chris," Blagojevich said, referring to Kelly, according to a source with knowledge of the exchange. Kelly and Johnston are longtime friends, and the governor has maintained that he's still close to Kelly, who had been indicted on federal tax charges a year before the secretly recorded conversation.

"Well what took, you know, a whole year?" Blagojevich continued, possibly referring to the time they had been waiting for a contribution from Johnston.

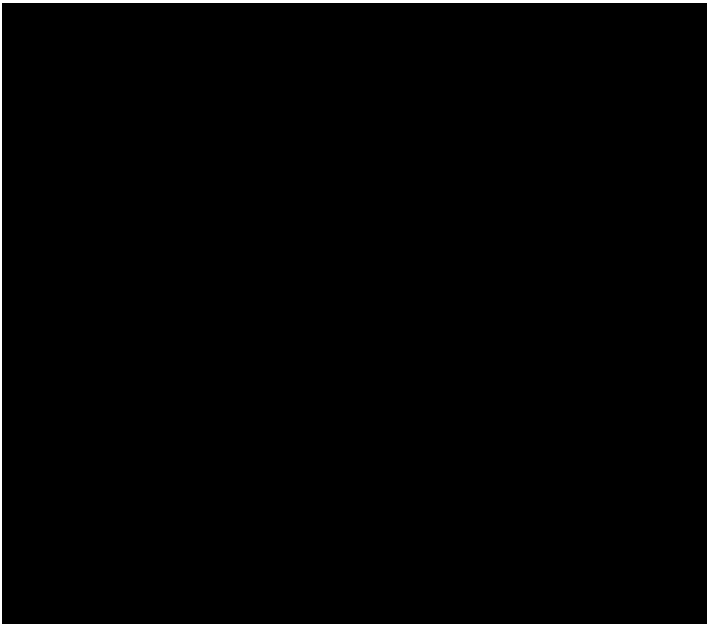
"I don't think he's been talking to Chris," Monk said.

The tapes rolled as FBI Special Agent Daniel Cain told senators the voice on the recordings was positively Blagojevich and that agents listened repeatedly to the tapes before quoting excerpts in the criminal complaint. Over and over, Cain told lawmakers he couldn't go beyond the charges, but when asked if an indictment would follow the criminal complaint against the governor, he said: "The answer is yes."

The recordings were so convincing to one leading Democrat, who was an architect of the House impeachment effort, that he predicted a 59-0 vote against the governor in the Senate.

"I don't think there is any defense to this whatsoever," said Rep. Jack Franks (D-Woodstock). "I don't see how anybody gets past this."

Contributing: *Jordan Wilson*



nightslider wrote:

WELL HERE'S ONE BAG O SHIT THAT HAS TO FIND A NEW OCCUPATION, EVEN THOUGH THE LAWYER'S HAVE GIVEN UP ON THE LOUD MOUTH HE HASN'T GIVEN UP ON HIMSELF, TO BAD THE FEDS WILL BE FEEDING HIM BIRD SEED BEFORE TO LONG, AND LETS JUST HOPE HE KEEPS A TWITTERING AWAY, LOVE THE AMUSEMENT LIKE THE PALIN SHOW. L.M.F.A O.W.T.I.I.M.E.Ys

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valwayne wrote:

How can you have a fair trial if you don't allow in all of the evidence and allow the defendant to call witnesses. I think Gov Blago is corrupt, but what the Illinois Senate is doing is just sweeping it under a rug as fast as they can proving they are all corrupt!

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concerned in chicago wrote:

Oh give me a break. Those State Senators and State Reps are only lucky their own phone conversations aren't being played for the world. Hopefully before all this over, they will be. These wiretaps seem pretty weak. I'm sure there is much jucier stuff said everyday by Blago's impeachers. And that Dan Cronin just sounds like a drama queen. Someone oughta follow his votes and the contributions he's gotten.

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mk2006 wrote:

You're kidding, right! Do you people even live in this state??? The impeachment proceedings don't have anything to do with the criminal complaint so he hasn't been found guilty of anything. Impeachment only means that the people of the state don't believe that he's working for the benefit of the people! Blago has been screwing this state continually for years and he should have been impeached long ago.

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poorbutworknonit wrote:

Can you imagine if they taped EVERY politicians conversations. I have the feeling this one would get the lowest rating on youtube.

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nouser wrote:

he didn't take anything because the feds stepped in. He would have, he's a Crook, from Crook County, just like Daley, Hussein Obama, Resko, and on, and on. and on.

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joe strick wrote:

Now what do we think N.Y. Governor went through to make his decision? His goal is to reelected also. Are we to think he did not cut a deal to make a decision?

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bigblock wrote:

IM SO TIRED OF THIS UNITED STATE..THEY SAY INNOCENT UNTIL PROVEN GUILTY...THAT ONLY APPLYS TO THE ONES WITH SECOND STANDERS...EVERYBODY JUMPING ON THE BAN WAGON.SAYING BLAGO GUILTY.STOP IT.WHERE IS THE BEING OPEN MINED YOU BIG PROFESSIONAL SENATORS IT SHOW THAT THEY HAVE A DEPRESSED AND ONE TRACK MIND....HINT PERRY MASON KEEP SETTING THE STAGE..HEE..HEE

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fair trial's comment is abusive and has been removed.

fair trial wrote:

-Remember that the hospital tripled Michelle Obama's salary right about the time that Barack was elected to the U.S. Senate.Posted by: donostiarra | March 14, 2008 8:35 AM ETC. All written by you, Americans. Rod was trying to do the same. It is sad he cannot tell to anybody "YOu are a racist" and cut talk in that way. Good night, America wherever you are.

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