

Blagojevich defies Senate, tabs Burriss for seat

Special to Sentinel-Voice

CHICAGO — A defiant Gov. Rod Blagojevich on Tuesday appointed a former state attorney general to Barack Obama's former Senate seat, a surprise move that put his opponents in the uncomfortable position of trying to block a veteran political trailblazer from becoming the Senate's only Black member. Blagojevich's appointment of Roland Burriss injected race into the drama surrounding the embattled governor, who sought to make the issue more about the man he selected rather than the seat he's accused of trying to sell.

"Please don't allow the allegations against me to taint a good and honest man," the governor said, turning to the smiling 71-year-old standing by his side.

Burriss said he discussed the appointment with Blagojevich Sunday night. "I



Former Illinois Attorney General Roland Burriss (R) gestures as he accepts Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich's appointment to fill the vacant U.S. Senate seat of President-elect Barack Obama during a news conference in Chicago on Tuesday. Burriss had long eyed the seat.

was asked if he would appoint me, would I accept, and the answer is yes," Burriss said.

Burriss said he has no connection to the charges against Blagojevich, who was ar-

rested earlier this month on charges that he tried to sell Obama's Senate seat to the highest bidder.

Burriss was the first African-American elected to major statewide office in Illinois. He served as comptroller and ran for governor three times — the last time losing to Blagojevich.

The Democratic governor's announcement may be an empty gesture. Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White, who must certify the appointment, said Tuesday he will not do so. And Senate leaders reiterated that they would not accept anyone appointed by Blagojevich.

In a statement Tuesday, Senate Democrats maintained that Blagojevich should not make the appointment because doing so would be unfair to Burriss and to the people of Illinois.

"It is truly regrettable that despite requests from all 50 Democratic senators and public officials throughout Illinois, Gov. Blagojevich would take the imprudent step of appointing someone to the United States Senate who would serve under a shadow and be plagued by questions of impropriety," the statement said.

"Under these circumstances, anyone appointed by Gov. Blagojevich cannot be an effective representative of the people of Illinois and, as we have said, will not be seated by the Democratic caucus."

Lt. Gov. Pat Quinn said Blagojevich's decision to appoint Burriss is an "insult to the people of Illinois."

"We believe in clean government, and Rod Blagojevich has unclean hands," Quinn said.

Obama favored in exchange for a position in the new president's Cabinet or naming someone favored by a union if he got a high-level union job.

The governor has faced a flood of calls for his resignation, and the Illinois House has begun impeachment proceedings. He maintains his innocence and has vowed to stay in office.

Blagojevich's own lawyer said recently that there would be no point in the governor naming someone to the Senate because leaders there would reject his appointment.

Democratic state Rep. Mary Flowers, a member of the impeachment committee, said Burriss is qualified to sit in the Senate, but she is not swayed in her decision concerning impeachment.

"One has nothing to do with the other," Flowers said.

White, who handles the state's paperwork, said he would not formally certify any appointment made by Blagojevich "because of the current cloud of controversy surrounding the governor."

It's not clear whether

White's refusal would be enough to prevent a Blagojevich appointment from taking effect.

Burriss is a native of Centralia in southern Illinois who graduated from Southern Illinois University before earning his law degree from Howard University.

He served as Illinois' comptroller from 1979 to 1991 and as the state's attorney general from 1991 to 1995. He also served as vice chairman of the Democratic National Committee from 1985 to 1989.

More recently, however, Burriss has had a string of political disappointments.

He lost campaigns for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination in 1994, 1998 and 2002 — the last time losing to Blagojevich. In 1995, he was badly beaten when challenging Chicago Mayor Richard Daley in the primary.

Before taking public office, Burriss worked in banking and served as national executive director and chief operating officer for Operation PUSH, the Chicago-based civil rights organization led by Jesse Jackson.

Deadline extended on La. disaster help

Special to Sentinel-Voice

NEW ORLEANS (NNPA) — The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has extended the registration deadline for Individual Assistance for survivors of Hurricane Ike to January 12, 2009.

Individual Assistance includes temporary rental assistance or hotel stays as well as grants or loans to repair or replace damaged property and belongings.

"It is good news that Louisiana's Hurricane Ike survivors have an extended period to register for Individual Assistance to help them get back on their feet," said U.S. Sen. Mary Landrieu, D-La. following the extension announcement.

Twenty Louisiana parishes have been designated Federal Disaster Areas as a

result of Hurricane Ike and are eligible for the Individual Assistance program.

Residents of affected parishes can visit one of FEMA's Disaster Recovery Centers (DRCs) for help with registration for disaster assistance, hazard mitigation, disaster loan applications and information and contacts for other programs.

The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) is also on hand to meet individually with each applicant to provide assistance in completing his or her disaster loan application and to accept completed disaster loan applications.

For more information, call the FEMA helpline at 1-800-621-FEMA (3362) or TTY 1-800-462-7585, log on to www.fema.gov.

Song

(Continued from Page 2)

manship, former Ohio Secretary of State Ken Blackwell, didn't refer directly to Saltsman or the parody. Blackwell, who is Black, contended in a statement Saturday that "there is hypersensitivity in the press regarding matters of race" because of Obama's election, and he concluded, "All of my competitors for this leadership post are fine people."

The Hill, a Capitol Hill newspaper that published a story about the CD on Friday, reported that Saltsman said members of the GOP committee have "the good humor and good sense" to see Shanklin's tunes as "light-hearted political parodies."

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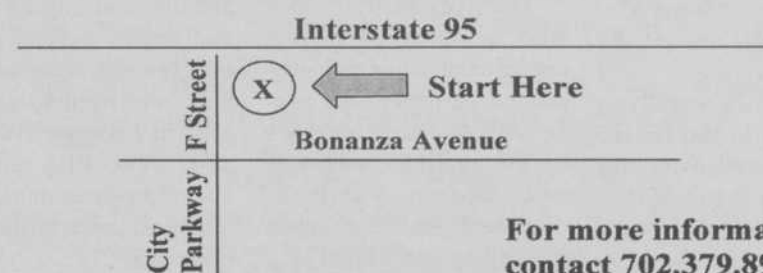
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