



## Blagojevich indicted on corruption charges

By Judy Keen, USA TODAY

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CHICAGO — Rod Blagojevich and five associates were indicted Thursday on federal corruption charges for a scheme to enrich the former Illinois governor that prosecutors said began before he took office in 2003.

Blagojevich, a Democrat who was impeached and removed from office in January, was charged with 16 felony counts, including racketeering conspiracy, wire fraud, extortion conspiracy, attempted extortion and making false statements to federal agents.

### **COURT PAPERS:** [Official indictment](#)

Maximum penalty for the false statements charge is five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine; conviction on each of the other counts could result in 20 years and \$250,000 in fines.

Blagojevich said in a statement that he was "saddened and hurt but ... not surprised by the indictment. I am innocent. I now will fight in the courts to clear my name."

A summary of the charges says Blagojevich allegedly used his office to obtain money and jobs for himself and others in exchange for official actions and tried to sell the U.S. Senate seat vacated by Barack Obama.

"This is another punch in the eye," said Cindi Canary of the non-partisan Illinois Campaign for Political Reform. "Illinois is in trouble."

Also indicted: Blagojevich's brother Robert, a former campaign fund chairman; former chiefs of staff John Harris and Alonzo Monk; former campaign fundraiser Christopher Kelly and William Cellini, a businessman who raised money for Blagojevich. Prosecutors said Harris is cooperating with them.

The indictment seeks forfeiture of all funds and assets of Blagojevich's campaign committee, \$188,370 from the former governor.

"This is not a timid indictment," University of Illinois law professor Andrew Leipold said. "I would certainly be anxious if I were the governor."

This week, a reform commission recommended tightening campaign regulations. "I think people are ready for real reform and not lip service," said state Rep. Roger Eddy, a Republican. Democratic state Rep. Jack Franks said it's time to "disinfect the cesspool of our politics."

Vashti Varnado, business law and ethics professor at Argosy University in Schaumburg, Ill., said the indictment comes at a bad time: Olympics officials are here assessing the city's bid for the 2016 Summer Games.

Chicago defense lawyer Ron Safer, a former assistant U.S. attorney, said Blagojevich could face at least 10 years in prison if he's convicted. Safer predicts the investigation "is not over by a long shot."

A court date for Blagojevich's arraignment was not announced.

Blagojevich was arrested Dec. 9. He was removed from office Jan. 29 and succeeded by Lt. Gov. Pat Quinn.

When the story emerged, Blagojevich said Jan. 26 on ABC's *The View*, "You'll see there was no criminal wrongdoing, certainly no criminal intent." Taped conversations that led to his arrest focused on doing "the best

things for the people of Illinois," he said.

The drama extended to the Obama administration and Capitol Hill. Obama advisers, including White House chief of staff Rahm Emanuel, were pressed to explain their conversations with Blagojevich about filling the U.S. Senate seat. After Blagojevich appointed former Illinois attorney general Roland Burris, the U.S. Senate first refused to seat him, then allowed him to take office.

Burris then faced questions about his shifting descriptions of contacts with Blagojevich advisers about the appointment and his admission that he attempted to raise campaign funds for the former governor. The U.S. Senate Ethics Committee is investigating Burris' appointment and Sangamon County, Ill., state's attorney John Schmidt is investigating whether Burris committed perjury before an Illinois House impeachment committee.

Last week, Blagojevich hosted a Chicago radio show. He didn't address the pending criminal charges against him, but he said he was ousted by Democrats who wanted to raise the state income tax.

"I really wish I was still the governor," Blagojevich told one caller.

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