

WITHDRAWING JARRETT'S CANDIDACY AS AN F-U TO BLAGOJEVICH

The WSJ notices something I pointed out Tuesday. There was a two-hour meeting on November 10 at which Blago's team tried to concoct a way to get Obama's team to give something of value in exchange for Valerie Jarrett's appointment to replace Obama as Senator. Here's my version:

Then, on November 10, Blago appeared to have gotten his first rebuff from the Obama team. On that day, Blago and his aides (and his wife), including Advisor B, had a two hour conference call with advisors in DC, brainstorming ways they could "monetize" the Senate seat. At one point, Blago said that he would appoint Jarrett,"but if they feel like they can do this and not fucking give me anything . . . then I'll fucking go [Senate Candidate 5]." At that point, Blago's already incensed at Obama, saying, "'motherfucker [Obama] his senator. Fuck him. For nothing? Fuck him." [...] By November 11, [...] Blago said, "they're not willing to give me anything except appreciation. Fuck them," it seems Obama has clearly already rebuffed Blago's efforts. And by the 12th, public reports had Jarrett announcing she didn't want the seat.

The WSJ corrects my version, though, in one respect: it points out that CNN reported the night of the 10th that Jarrett withdrew her candidacy. Here's CNN:

Two Democratic sources close to President-elect Barack Obama tell CNN that top adviser Valerie Jarrett will

not be appointed to replace him in the U.S. Senate.

"While he (Obama) thinks she would be a good senator, he wants her in the White House," one top Obama advisor told CNN Monday.

But I think the WSJ asks the wrong question about the coincidence of these events. It asks,

But the big question today is this: Were any members of his transition team among the "Washington advisers" on the line during this marathon conference call, or did one of the participants fill them in about these wild ideas?

[snip]

At a bare minimum, the timing of Team Obama's decision to remove Ms. Jarrett's name from contention, or at least to remove her name from the public speculation about the post, seems extraordinarily lucky. It came on the very same day the FBI secretly recorded Mr. Blagojevich telling a huge conference call loaded with politicians, in Illinois and Washington, that he wasn't about to give the Senate spot away for nothing.

That is, the WSJ is in a tizzy wondering whether Blago ever contacted Obama's team about its grand dreams for trading on that seat.

But the WSJ ignores the key detail from the next day—a detail that, I pointed out, makes it clear that Obama's team had been contacted and then rebuffed Blago's efforts. On the 11th, after all, Blago said, "they're not willing to give me anything except appreciation. Fuck them." That makes it clear, I think, that Blago did approach Obama's team. And Obama's team said no. Jarrett's withdrawal was simply the public expression of what someone in Obama's team had

privately already said to Blago: Fuck you.

Which is why, presumably, Obama could assert with such confidence today that, "no representatives of mine would have any part of any deals related to this seat."

Let me say that I was as appalled and disappointed as anybody by the revelations earlier this week. I have never spoken to the governor on this subject. I am confident that no representatives of mine would have any part of any deals related to this seat. I think the materials released by the US Attorney reflect that fact. I've asked my team to gather the facts of any contacts with the governor's office about this vacancy so that we can share them with you over the next few days.

[snip]

What I want to do is gather the facts about any staff contacts that may have taken place, between the transition office and the governor's office, and we'll have those in the next few days and we'll present them. But what I'm absolutely certain about is that our office had no involvement in any deal making around my senate seat. That, I'm absolutely certain of.

[snip]

Q: Have you or anyone in your transition or campaign been interviewed as it relates to the criminal complaint? And who is the transition advisor referenced in the complaint?

Obama: I have not been contacted by any federal officials. And we have not been interviewed by them. As is reflected in the US Attorney's report, we were not, um, I think, perceived by the governor's office as amenable to any deal-making.

[snip]

Beyond that, I'm not really certain where the investigation is going forward. I'll leave Mr. Fitzgerald to address those issues.

Obama is later asked why he believes that Blago believed Obama's team wouldn't play; Obama dodges the issue, saying he wouldn't presume to imagine what Blago was thinking.

Obama does several things with his comments here.

- He does not deny that someone(s) from his transition team spoke to Blago's team—he says simply that the press will get details about who spoke to whom and when in the next few days
- He emphasizes that the complaint makes it clear that no one from Obama's team was willing to deal with Blago—which suggests it is quite fair to assume someone told Blago to fuck off on November 10 or thereabouts
- He parses carefully about contacts with Fitz' office: he, Obama, has not had any contact with the office, and no one has been interviewed; but he does not deny that someone from the transition team has had contact with

Fitz' office

- He refuses to say whether anyone shortly will be interviewed by Fitz' office

All of which suggests, I think, that there someone did have contact with Blago's team, that person told Blago to fuck off (and given the strong possibility that this person was Rahm, probably literally said just that). And that whoever that person is has already had contact with Fitz' office about the incident.

So the question the WSJ should be asking is not whether Obama's team talked to Blago or what they said—that's all pretty clear. The question should be, did Obama's team talk to Fitz about it before or after Tuesday morning?

In either case, it's crystal clear they refused to play Blago's game. But did they tell Fitz of Blago's games before Tuesday?