

IS RAHM STILL RUNNING FOR SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE?



(Alex Wong/Getty Images photo)

Or is Blago delirious about that too?

I'm finally getting around to reading the collected works of Michael Sneed, the woman scribe calls "this scandal's Judy." Sneed is the columnist whom Blago was using to launder his leaks about the Senate selection process, feeding her false information about his leading candidates, with the intention of pressuring Obama and others to respond accordingly.

(Incidentally, TheraP pointed to this diary which claimed Sneed's more embarrassing columns were getting removed from the Sun-Times archive, but they're actually still there; it's just that they go behind the pay firewall after one month.)

Given that we know Blago was using Sneed in that way, I'm particularly interested in her column from November 14 (which also just went behind the firewall). In it, she has what may well be another regurgitated Blago rant.

IS IT EMIL? **Sneed** hears Gov. Blago, who will choose Obama's replacement in the U.S. Senate, privately feels there may be only one choice that makes sense: His buddy, outgoing Senate President Emil Jones. – To wit: Jones is this/close to Blago, who may pay his pal back for being such a staunch ally. Jones would also be a strong ally in the Senate for his political godson – Obama.

– Hmm: Isn't it true Gov. Blago, who truly believes a federal indictment is not in his future, is hoping Jones would be a placeholder until 2010 – when Gov.

Rod could opt for a Senate seat or another run at the governorship? Is someone smoking posies?

Fitz's chronology ends on November 13—which would presumably be the day Blago would have leaked this to Sneed for her November 14 column; the complaint doesn't confirm that the leak came from Blago. Yet the attribution seems to clearly point to Blago, and given the sheer number of leaks she was getting from him, it seems likely that he was her source for this, too.

With that in mind, check out the news that led that column:

Incoming & outgoing: The rumor mill is going berserk!- To wit: **Top Dem wags are whispering Rahm Emanuel, President-elect Barack Obama's new chief of staff, plans to exit the White House in two years in hopes of reclaiming his congressional seat – thereby enabling him to work toward becoming speaker of the House, his dream job.**

– The big question? Who would be Rahm's seat warmer, the person willing to step down in two years? A phalanx of pols are already lining up for the job. (Crain's reporter Greg Hinz is suggesting Rahm's chief of staff John Borovicka.)

– The flip side: The rumor is being denied by Rahm's office.

– The tip side: No one has faster moves than Rahm, who can pirouette around any problem faster than a speeding ballet dancer, which . . . of course . . . Rahm was trained to be. [my emphasis]

Would Blago count as a "top Dem wag"? Probably.

I ask, because the complaint describes this as Blago's frenzied rant of the day on November 13:

On November 13, 2008, ROD BLAGOJEVICH

talked with JOHN HARRIS. ROD BLAGOJEVICH said he wanted to be able to call “[President-elect Advisor]” and tell President-elect Advisor that “this has nothing to do with anything else we’re working on but the Governor wants to put together a 501(c)(4)” and “can you guys help him. . . raise 10, 15 million.” ROD BLAGOJEVICH said he wanted “[President-elect Advisor] to get the word today,” and that when **“he asks me for the Fifth CD thing”** I want it to be in his head.” (The reference to the “Fifth CD thing” is believed to relate to a seat in the United States House of Representatives from Illinois’ Fifth Congressional District. Prior intercepted phone conversations indicate that ROD BLAGOJEVICH and others were determining whether ROD BLAGOJEVICH has the power to appoint an interim replacement until a special election for the seat can be held.). [my emphasis]

In other words, the day before Sneed published the claim that Rahm was hoping to put a seat-warmer in his Congressional seat to set up a return to Congress and a run for Speaker after two years of serving as Obama’s Chief of Staff, Blago was planning to talk to Rahm about the “Fifth CD thing.” And, Fitz reveals, there had been prior conversations about whether Blago could name an interim replacement for Rahm’s seat.

Now, as with all of Blago’s rants, we shouldn’t assume that they reflect any reality. For example, I cannot believe that Rahm, of all people, wouldn’t know well how his replacement would be chosen.

Still, the picture above of Rahm apparently nuzzling Grandma Pelosi (which was taken just after TARP passed) keeps haunting me. Sure, that picture almost certainly caught Rahm whispering to the Speaker and their proximity and her look of relief made it look very creepy. But boy he’s

a slimy bastard.

This line from the complaint also keeps haunting me:

...nor does this affidavit set forth other calls where ROD BLAGOJEVICH and others discussed a possible appointment to the Senate seat based on considerations other than financial gain for ROD BLAGOJEVICH and his family, discussions which took place with greater frequency after efforts to arrange for a private job for ROD BLAGOJEVICH in exchange for appointing a particular candidate to the open Senate seat did not meet with success.

I've already talked about the degree to which Fitz was signaling that he had much more—without revealing what he had. If Rahm was trying to game his replacement to set up a run for Speaker ... or, alternately, if Blago was trying to falsely insinuate via leaks to Sneed that Rahm was trying to game the replacement in hopes he might get the upper hand over Obama's team ... it suggests those conversations about non-monetary exchange would be mighty interesting. As Fitz says, such conversations took place more frequently just after Fitz stops his narrative, and there's a certain drama in the way Fitz' narrative introduces what appears to be Rahm, then drops the story.

Two days ago, Obama promised that his team would produce a summary of all contacts with Blago in a few days. We're still waiting for that summary.

I still believe the reports that Rahm is neither a target nor a subject of Fitz' investigation. I'm still confident that Obama has reason to be certain that "no representatives of mine would have any part of any deals related to this seat."

But I'm increasingly wondering whether Rahm's contacts with Blago immediately after Fitz drops

his narrative are either significantly embarrassing and revealing for Rahm. Or, whether they reflect Blago's twisted and frenzied fabulations about having some kind of power over the Obama camp.