

# BLAGOJEVICH, REID, AND RAHM: WHO IS DISTORTING CLAIMS ABOUT JESSE JACKSON JR.?

The Sun-Times has updated its story on Reid's calls to Rod Blagojevich with this statement from Harry Reid:

*Gov. Blagojevich appears to be trying to distract attention from his daunting legal problems and damaged credibility **by distorting information about private phone calls between himself and other public officials.** It is regrettable and reprehensible.*

Gov. Blagojevich's efforts to try to tarnish others while the cloud of suspicion continues to grow over him are shameful, as are his efforts to further betray the public trust and sow seeds of division. As each day passes it becomes increasingly clear that Gov. Blagojevich is not fit to lead, and he should resign.

I will not allow his corruption charges or his antics to distract me from leading the Senate, to drive a wedge in our party or **to obscure the facts.** [my emphasis]

(Reid just accused Blago of lying about it on MTP, as well.)

I'm fascinated not only by Reid's decision to respond to what he apparently believes is a Blago leak, but by his accusation that Blago is lying. That's because there are now three different versions about whether or not Jesse Jackson Jr. was acceptable to Obama and Reid.

Recall that, several weeks ago, someone leaked to the Trib details of Rahm's discussions with Blago about "acceptable" candidates for the Senate seat. That list rather notably did not include JJJ.

Emanuel delivered a list of candidates who would be "acceptable" to Obama, the source said. On the list were Obama adviser Valerie Jarrett, Illinois Veterans Affairs director Tammy Duckworth, state Comptroller Dan Hynes and U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky of Chicago, the source said. All are Democrats.

Sometime after the election, Emanuel called Harris back to add the name of Democratic Atty. Gen. Lisa Madigan to the approved list, the source said.

In fact, except for Jarrett, that list did not include any African-American candidates.

But that's not who Rahm says was on the list.

Between the time that Mr. Emanuel decided to accept the position of Chief of Staff in the White House and December 8, 2008, Mr. Emanuel had about four telephone conversations with John Harris, Chief of Staff to the Governor, on the subject of the Senate seat. In these conversations, Mr. Emanuel and Mr. Harris discussed the merits of potential candidates and the strategic benefit that each candidate would bring to the Senate seat. After Ms. Jarrett removed herself from consideration, Mr. Emanuel – with the authorization of the President-Elect – gave Mr. Harris the names of four individuals whom the President-Elect considered to be highly qualified: **Dan Hynes, Tammy Duckworth, Congresswoman Schakowsky and Congressman Jesse Jackson, Jr.** In later telephone conversations, Mr. Emanuel – also with the President-Elect's approval –

presented other names of qualified candidates to Mr. Harris including **Attorney General Lisa Madigan and Ms. Cheryle Jackson.** [my emphasis]

The Trib's sources say JJJ and Cheryle Jackson were not on the list, Rahm says they were.

Now look at the context for Reid's purported list from the Sun-Times story.

Blagojevich spokesman Lucio Guerrero confirmed that Reid (D-Nev.) and U.S. Sen. Robert Menendez (D-N.J.) – the new chief of the Senate Democratic political operation – each called Blagojevich's campaign office separately Dec. 3. Sources believe that at least portions of the phone conversations are on tape.

Before their contacts, Obama's chief of staff Rahm Emanuel called Blagojevich to tell him to expect to hear from Senate leadership because they were pushing against Jackson and others, according to statements the governor made to others.

The Reid-Menendez calls came a day before a Dec. 4 conversation overheard on government wiretaps where Blagojevich says he "was getting 'a lot of pressure' not to appoint Candidate 5." Candidate 5 is Jackson.

The story paints a chronology in which Rahm calls Blago some time on or before December 3, then Reid and Menendez call Blago on December 3, and finally, Blago has the following conversation on December 4.

ROD BLAGOJEVICH told Fundraiser A to tell Individual D that Senate Candidate 5 was very much a realistic candidate for the open Senate seat, but that ROD BLAGOJEVICH was getting "a lot of pressure" not to appoint Senate Candidate 5. ROD BLAGOJEVICH told

Fundraiser A to tell Individual D that ROD BLAGOJEVICH had a problem with Senate Candidate 5 just promising to help ROD BLAGOJEVICH because ROD BLAGOJEVICH had a prior bad experience with Senate Candidate 5 not keeping his word. ROD BLAGOJEVICH told Fundraiser A to tell Individual D that if Senate Candidate 5 is going to be chosen to fill the Senate seat "some of this stuffs gotta start happening now . . . right now. . . and we gotta see it. You understand?" ROD BLAGOJEVICH told Fundraiser A that "you gotta be careful how you express that and assume everybody's listening, the whole world is listening. You hear me?"

The Sun-Times doesn't note it, but the claim that Blago was getting "a lot of pressure" not to appoint JJJ was part of his pitch to one of JJJ's donors for a quid pro quo pertaining to JJJ's appointment to the seat. Remember, too, that Blago was demonstrably leaking information about who was and was not a leading candidate in an attempt to drum up urgency among potential players in the Senate seat sale, as when he leaked the "news" that Madigan was rising in consideration to Michael Sneed. This raises the possibility that Blago's claim that he was getting a lot of pressure was a lie, intended (like the Madigan leak) to increase the sense of urgency among JJJ's donors who—remarkably enough—had a fund-raiser scheduled for that weekend. The complaint does not say whether Blago really was getting a lot of pressure or not, but Blago also said, twice, on December 4 that he was elevating JJJ in consideration because he thought he could get money for the seat.

On December 4, 2008, ROD BLAGOJEVICH spoke to Advisor B and informed Advisor B that he was giving Senate Candidate 5 greater consideration for the Senate seat because, among other reasons, if

ROD BLAGOJEVICH ran for re-election  
Senate Candidate 5 would "raise[] money"  
for ROD BLAGOJEVICH, although ROD  
BLAGOJEVICH said he might "get some  
(money) up front, maybe" from Senate  
Candidate 5 to insure Senate Candidate 5  
kept his promise about raising money for  
ROD BLAGOJEVICH.

[snip]

Later on December 4, 2008, ROD  
BLAGOJEVICH spoke to Fundraiser A. ROD  
BLAGOJEVICH stated he was "elevating"  
Senate Candidate 5 on the list of  
candidates for the open Senate seat. ROD  
BLAGOJEVICH stated he might be able to  
cut a deal with Senate Candidate 5 that  
provided ROD BLAGOJEVICH with something  
"tangible up front."

In other words, Blago was claiming he was  
getting a lot of pressure, but that would have  
been before he even gave JJJ serious  
consideration. Blago may or may not have been  
pressured, but his claim is tied directly to  
negotiations that allegedly involved the sale of  
the Senate seat for \$1.5 million.

Also note the discrepancy between the Sun-Times'  
latest version of discussions—in which Rahm  
purportedly spoke directly to Blago around  
December 3—and the Obama report, which states  
that Rahm only spoke to Blago about the Senate  
seat twice (at most), both times in early  
November. That Sun-Times version, though, is  
sourced to "statements the governor made to  
others," which seems to parallel Blago's claims  
that he was getting a lot of pressure—which may  
or may not have been invented.

Now, frankly, I don't know what to make of these  
three contradictory stories. Blago's sources  
appear to claim that neither Obama nor Reid  
supported a JJJ candidacy. Obama's version  
clearly states he did. And Reid won't tell his  
version (saying he doesn't remember it), but he

states clearly that Blago's version is false.

But I find it really telling that, first of all, Blago is shamelessly race-baiting in his efforts to successfully appoint Burris to the Senate seat, and, at the same time, he claims neither Obama nor Reid supported African-Americans for the Senate seat (except for Jarrett). At the same time, the question of whether or not Blago really was being pressured not to appoint JJJ may inflect the interpretation of the recorded conversations about Blago's intent to appoint JJJ to the Senate seat.

Blago might be telling the truth.

Or, he might be inventing this story to both support his larger attempts to make everyone else (including Obama?) look like racists, and to explain away comments he made in early December that would otherwise seriously incriminate him.