

FIVE YEARS AFTER PAY-TO-PLAY GANG TRIED TO GET FITZ FIRED, BLAGOJEVICH TRIES AGAIN

IMO, Blago's been playing his whole post-arrest period about as well as could be expected, up to and including making the Senate Majority Leader look like an amateur. But today's latest move may well backfire.

Blago's lawyers just filed (in a motion they tried to keep sealed) to get Fitz dismissed from his case.

Lawyers for Gov. Rod Blagojevich have filed a sealed motion to remove U.S. Atty. Patrick Fitzgerald and his assistants from prosecution of the case against the governor, a federal judge disclosed today.

U.S. District Chief Judge James Holderman ordered the defense today to file that motion publicly.

After today's court session, Sheldon Sorosky, a Blagojevich lawyer, said the defense wanted Fitzgerald's removed "because of the statements made in the announcement of the arrest of Gov. Blagojevich."

Sorosky was asked if the defense believed Fitzgerald used inflammatory language in the announcement. "The motion speaks for itself," Sorosky said.

Mind you, I'm sure Blago can find all manner of discredited shill who will argue that Fitzgerald spoke improperly at his press conference announcing Blago's arrest. But that doesn't change the fact that Blago is now asking for

something his alleged confederates tried to do over four years ago—get Fitz fired (or at least removed from this case). The same Rezko trial witnesses that form the foundation of Fitz's case against Blago, after all, also testified that the gang tried to get Fitz fired.

In a hearing before court began, prosecutors said they hoped to call Ali Ata, the former Blagojevich administration official who pleaded guilty to corruption yesterday, to the stand.

Assistant U.S. Atty. Carrie Hamilton said she believed Ata would testify to conversations Ata had with his political patron, Rezko, about working to pull strings to kill the criminal investigation into Rezko and others when it was in its early stages in 2004.

"[Ata] had conversations with Mr. Rezko about the fact that Mr. Kjellander was working with Karl Rove to have Mr. Fitzgerald removed," Hamilton told U.S. District Judge Amy St. Eve.

The one member of the pay-to-play gang who has not yet publicly admitted they tried to take Fitz out—Rezko—is, by all appearances—getting more cooperative by the day.

So while maybe I'm misreading how this latest play will go over, I gotta say the optics of it stinks. Blago's alleged accomplices have been gunning for Fitz for years. And now, post-arrest, the first thing he does is try once more to get Fitz fired?