

ANY BETS BURRIS DID BUNDLE DONATIONS?

Here's a prediction of where the new Burris controversy is going: I suspect we'll find out, in coming days, that while Burris did not donate directly to Blago, he never refused to bundle donations for Blago. I don't know whether Burris actually **did** bundle donations, but I suspect we'll learn that Burris has never refused to do so.

As Sun-Times reports, there is some debate over whether, as part of his discussions with Rob Blagojevich after the election, of fund-raising from others for Blago.

In October and again in November, Burris spoke with Robert Blagojevich, who initially asked him to host a fund-raiser. Burris said he'd get back to him after the election, sources with knowledge of the conversations said. The two later talked again, and Burris again was asked for campaign cash.

Burris said he refused to contribute and "made it unequivocally clear ... that it would be inappropriate and pose a major conflict because I was interested in the Senate vacancy."

A source with knowledge of the exchange said there was some discussion about Burris possibly getting others to give or raise money on his behalf. Not so, according to Burris: "I did not donate or help raise a single dollar for the governor from those conversations and would never consider making a donation through a third party."

Note the form of Burris' denial. In response to an assertion that there was "some discussion about Burris possibly getting others to give or

raise money on his behalf," Burris (in what appears to be an unsworn statement to the newspaper) responds, "I did not ... help raise a single dollar for the governor ... and would never consider making a donation through a third party." I'm not sure what the "did not ... help raise a single dollar" would include (would it include telling his partner—who was on the board of the charity at which Blago's wife worked—to go raise money, but then not getting involved in the actual fundraising?), but Burris then says he would not make a donation through a third party, which is slightly different than having others give on your behalf.

The Trib provides more details, quoting Rob Blagojevich's lawyer saying there **was** such a discussion.

"I was asked to raise money by the governor's brother and made it unequivocally clear to him that it would be inappropriate and pose a major conflict because I was interested in the Senate vacancy," Burris said in the statement. "I did not donate or help raise a single dollar for the governor from those conversations and would never consider making a donation through a third party."

Robert Blagojevich's attorney, Michael Ettinger, said his client did ask Burris to help with fundraising but not to donate personally and that after Burris expressed his interest in the Senate seat no fundraiser was held.

Ettinger also said he presumes at least one of the two post-election calls between Burris and Robert Blagojevich was recorded by federal agents investigating the former governor, but that it will show no wrongdoing on his client's behalf.

Ettinger admits that Rob Blagojevich asked

Burris to "help with fundraising," but denies that a fundraiser itself was held.

Now look at how the statement Burris gave to the Sun-Times and Trib differs from his sworn affidavit:

In one of the other conversations [after the election] (I believe the last one), I mentioned the Senate seat in the context of saying that I could not contribute to Governor Blagojevich because it could be viewed as an attempt to curry favor with him regarding his decision to appoint a successor to President Obama. I did not raise or donate any funds to Governor Blagojevich after the fundraiser on June 27, 2008.

In what appears to be an unsworn statement, Burris says he did not "help raise" funds, whereas in his sworn affidavit, Burris says he did not "raise" funds. The latter would seem to involve Burris making calls himself, the former is more nebulous.

Now look at the exchange starting at 3:09 in the YouTube.

Durkin: Did you bundle any money for the Governor's campaign fund at any time in the last six months, from July 2008 until present?

(Burris' lawyer, Timothy Wright, grabs the mike.)

Wright: I'm sorry, Mr. Representative, you say, "bundle," what do you mean by "bundle"?

Durkin: Collected money.

Wright: Oh, like giving a fundraiser, is that what you're speaking of?

Durkin: Sure, I'd like to know that, I'd also like to know if Mr. Burris directed anybody to make contributions to the

Governor since July of this year.

Wright: (tries to interrupt before
Durkin finishes) Thanks.

Burris: The answer's no.

Now, presumably Burris' "no" would apply to both parts of Durkin's question: Did Burris hold a fundraiser or direct others to make contributions. But I think Wright's interjection (including his attempt to close off Durkin's clarification after he says "fundraiser") looks suspiciously like an attempt to redefine "bundle." After all, what politician doesn't know what "bundle" means? And it certainly looks like an attempt to blur the meaning of "collected money."

I'm guessing there's a reason that Burris is being so weasely with his definition of fundraiser.