

MONDAY, 9AM, ROLAND BURRIS IS STILL SENATOR

I've lost my touch.

It used to be I'd go away for a week and Karl Rove or Alberto Gonzales would resign. Here we are, Monday morning after I've been gone a week (thanks to bmaz for really superb work last week!), and Roland Burris is still Senator.

Maybe if I do a recap of Burris' week, though, and point out the looming holes in his story, then it'll hasten his departure.

Fitz Joins the Fun

Remember how, in his press conference trying to explain how he forgot to mention his talks with RobBlago and John Harris, Burris couldn't decide whether he had or had not been contacted by Fitz' people regarding his negotiations on buying a Senate seat?

That question has now been solved, as Burris spent some time with federal investigators on Saturday.

U.S. Sen. Roland Burris was interviewed by federal authorities for several hours Saturday as part of the ongoing corruption investigation into charges that former Gov. Rod Blagojevich tried to sell a Senate seat for personal or political profit, sources familiar with the talks said.

Burris' interview, which had been delayed for weeks, took place at his attorney's offices in downtown Chicago. He has been informed he is not a target of the probe, the sources said.

Several details of this are interesting: what was responsible for the "weeks" delay in Burris'

testimony? Did he have to straighten out his story to the legislature first (though he did not do that with the State Supreme Court), so as to attempt to prevent perjury charges? Or did Fitz just want to make sure they had a complete catalog of the times Burris spoke to Blago's people—including the multiple phone calls to John Harris that Burris still hasn't 'fessed to? Perhaps, too, Fitz wanted to wait until after the FBI started collecting information on Patti Blago's tenure at the Chicago Christian Industrial League, since that was one way (through Burris' partner Fred Lebed, who is on the board of the charity) that Burris could have influenced Blago in ways other than fundraising directly. Or, maybe, Burris was negotiating the terms on which he would be very forthcoming to Fitz?

Note that Burris' secret sources (otherwise known as his attorney, I'm guessing) have gone to the Robert Luskin school of prosecutor-talk. Burris "has been informed he is not a target" of the probe. But did anyone mention anything about him being a subject?

Reporting on Burris' Saturday chat with the Feds make it clear that the conversation pertained to the Senate seat sale, not to Burris' new alleged perjury. I'm guessing Fitz and the FBI asked some much more precise questions, including whether anyone gave money on behalf of Burris, what Sam Adam Jr. said to Burris when he offered him the seat, and whether RobBlago and Burris were brainstorming ways to raise money for Blago while covering their tracks after the election.

Burris' Lobbying Business

It was utterly predictable that Burris' lobbying disclosure—which he submitted with his tardy February 5 affidavit—would also reveal some surprises. After all, if it didn't include such surprises, why wait until after getting sworn in to release it?

In a Feb. 5 submission to the committee, Burris listed 26 clients dating to 2003.

But the filing contains discrepancies with documents filed with the Illinois Secretary of State's Office and with the Chicago Board of Ethics. A number of clients are listed only in either the legislative filing or in the agency records.

For example, records with the secretary of state show Burris representing the Council of Independent Tobacco Manufacturers of America from 2003 to 2005 and the Illinois Association of Mortgage Brokers in 2007. But those clients don't appear in his filing with the Impeachment Committee.

This is something I intend to look at more closely, because I suspect it is just as damning as the belated admission of discussions with Blago's people. One company that appears in Burris' affidavit but not the IL or Federal lobbyist databases, for example, is ACS Healthcare, a company that does healthcare IT outsourcing. Burris says he Burris & Lebed worked for ACS from 2005 to the present. Now, it may be that Burris was lobbying in other states (the company is HQed in MI and has an office in TX). But healthcare outsourcing is precisely the kind of thing that might be eligible for state-level kickbacks. So what did Burris do for the company, and did he do it in IL?

Is Reid Leveraging Burris Out?

On Friday, Darrell Thompson—whom Harry Reid had lent to Burris as Chief of Staff to help him get up to speed in the Senate—stepped down, effective immediately. It may be that Thompson just got tired of the Burris drama. But I suspect that Thompson's resignation reflects an early attempt on Harry Reid's part (in addition to the Senate ethics investigation) to leverage Burris out. By removing Burris' ability to work with any effectiveness in DC, Reid ensures that Burris remains expendable in the Senate.

I'm really waiting on Committee assignments, though. In the past, the Senate has often waited until a Senator was indicted, as Stevens was, before pulling key Committee assignments. But Reid can take away one big incentive of Burris' simply by taking away his Committee assignments, and there is a great deal of precedent for doing so when there is a question of corruption.

Calls for Burris to Resign

A stampede of public officials have now called for Burris to resign:

IL Governor Pat Quinn

Obama's Spokesperson, Robert Gibbs

Dick Durbin

Some anonymous African American ministers from Chicago

Daley's Silence on Burris

But not Richard Daley.

Also Saturday, Mayor Richard Daley declined to call for Burris to step down and sought to minimize the impact of the political controversy.

"Let's put everything in perspective and give him an opportunity to explain himself," Daley told reporters.

"Automatically, every time something happens, people want everybody to resign. Is it becoming very common now to tell people to resign after he was appointed?"

Asked if he thought voters who wanted more transparency in government were disappointed with the controversy over Burris' appointment, Daley said he thought people would eventually "move on with their lives."

"Three people got killed [last night]. Do you think the people who killed them care who is their U.S. senator?" Daley

█ said. "Life goes on."

Just weeks ago, Daley was willing to call Blago "cuckoo," but now he just wants everyone to move on with their life and their corrupt Senator.

Perhaps that's because some of Daley's own actions are getting more and more scrutiny.

█ Federal authorities are investigating five construction companies that collectively have gotten hundreds of millions of dollars in construction work at O'Hare Airport under Mayor Daley, the Chicago Sun-Times has learned.

One question being looked at, sources said, is how the companies landed those city deals.

News of the probe comes two days after Daley lobbied Congress to pass President Obama's multibillion-dollar stimulus bill – a package the mayor wants to include money for his O'Hare Modernization Program, which could cost as much as \$15 billion.

There's more news to come with Roland Burris, mark my words. But ultimately, neither Burris nor Blagojevich are the biggest corrupt targets in IL. And as this thing continues to blow up, it may get even more interesting.