

BURRIS' PARTNER FRED LEBED SPOKE OF FAVORS FOR BLAGOJEVICH

When Roland Burris was asked by the legislative committee whether his partner, Fred Lebed, had had any influence over the September 2008 hiring of Patti Blago at a non-profit on whose board he served, Burris claimed he would have no idea about Lebed's actions.

Perhaps that's true. But on the day when Blago appointed Burris (which was three months after Blago's wife had gotten hired), Lebed sure knew he'd have some favors to return to the Governor.

On the same December day then-Gov. Rod Blagojevich named Roland Burris to fill President Obama's U.S. Senate vacancy, Burris' right-hand political man, Fred Lebed, phoned an associate and told him, "We'll have to do some things for the governor."

That's the recollection of the associate, a health-care and political consultant named John Ruff, who went on to become one of Burris' co-plaintiffs on a January lawsuit that sought to help Burris claim his Senate seat.

Besides raising new questions about a possible quid pro quo between Blagojevich and Burris, Ruff also recalled Lebed telling him he'd had discussions about Burris' interest in the seat with Blagojevich representatives as far back as October. That claim by Ruff contradicts what Burris said in a Jan. 5 sworn statement that is now part of a state perjury investigation.

[snip]

Ruff is adamant that if prosecutors want to get to the bottom of whether Burris perjured himself, Lebed could be a key.

"There is more to be discovered," Ruff said. "I know the key to finding the information out is through Fred. That's the main point I wish to get across."

[snip]

One of the calls between Lebed and Ruff came Dec. 30, before Blagojevich made the stunning announcement later in the day he was appointing Burris to the vacant Senate seat.

"He called me at 9:04 a.m.," Ruff said of Lebed. "We talked for 12 minutes. He called to tell me that Gov. Blagojevich was appointing Roland as senator. I congratulated him and asked him how he managed to pull that one off. And that's when he made some flippant remark about 'We'll have to do some things for the governor.' "

If Lebed was talking about Burris angling for the seat back in October, it puts it very close to the time when Patti got appointed to the charity. From which she has since been fired.

I'd say Ruff is correct in suggesting that Lebed might have more to say about this topic.