

SAM ZELL CHATS WITH FITZ

I'm not so much surprised by the news, from yesterday, that the consultant brokering a deal between the Tribune Company and Rod Blagojevich spoke with Blago's Chief of Staff John Harris the day before the FBI arrested Blago to stop a "political corruption crime spree."

[Consultant Marc] Ganis also noted the Cubs were not part of the firm's bankruptcy filing and said, "Nils [Larsen] is going to call you and Sam [Zell] is going to call the Gov."

Nor am I surprised by the news that Sam Zell chatted with Fitz and friends under subpoena, or that he spoke with Blago the day before he was arrested.

Tribune Co. Chairman Sam Zell hired well-known defense lawyer Anton Valukas and was interviewed in January by federal prosecutors as a "potential witness" in the criminal investigation of former Illinois Gov. Rod R. Blagojevich, the company acknowledged Wednesday.

[snip]

In their subpoena to Tribune Co., federal authorities sought information about potential staff cuts or changes to the newspaper's editorial board. The company has said Tribune Co. executives did nothing inappropriate.

Tribune Co. also acknowledged state records, recently obtained by the Chicago Tribune, that show Zell making a phone call and giving a gift to Blagojevich.

According to records of Blagojevich's telephone logs, Zell placed a call to

the governor Dec. 8, the day before the arrest. Zell placed "courtesy calls" to several elected officials, including Mayor Richard M. Daley, that day to notify them that the company had just filed for bankruptcy protection, according to the statement from Liebenritt. "Mr. Zell's call to Mr. Blagojevich was not returned," the statement said.

Records also show that Zell gave Blagojevich a gift during 2008. The Liebenritt statement described the gift as a music box "or other specially created work of art."

The statement noted that for more than 30 years Zell has given such gifts to "local, national and world leaders . . . designed to share Mr. Zell's vision for the coming year for the investment climate and the economy."

I'm most intrigued by the timing of it.

Zell spoke to prosecutors in January. But we're just learning about it now, in mid-March. And we're learning about it from official sources at the Trib, not via less official sources.

You see, Fitz got a 90-day extension to the time when he needs to indict Blago, from January 7 to April 7. Which means anyone who wants to pre-empt news appearing in the indictment has less than a month to do so.

How handy for Zell that some of the media properties he bankrupted are still functioning well enough to allow him to do so.