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Final Edition

**Blago aide's computer yields new secrets; Chief of staff surfed Web on Emanuel vacancy, 'King Madigan'**

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SPRINGFIELD-Did then-Gov. Rod Blagojevich try to work out a plan to keep White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel's old congressional seat warm for him if Emanuel decided in a few years to return?

Computer records, newly obtained by the Chicago Sun-Times, offer the latest evidence the ousted governor did.

On the day last year that Emanuel was named White House chief of staff, John Harris, the top aide to then-Gov. Blagojevich, began researching whether Blagojevich had the authority to appoint someone to temporarily fill Emanuel's Northwest Side congressional seat, according to records that show the Web browser history on Harris' state government computer.

The records show that Harris, who was Blagojevich's chief of staff, Googled this exact search term on his state computer on Nov. 6, 2008: "temporary appointment to fill vacancies in the house of representatives."

The confirmation of Harris' Google search -- which, by the way, yielded 308,000 hits -- lends credence to previous Sun-Times reports that Blagojevich's office was working with Emanuel at that time on a strategy that would enable Emanuel to one day reclaim his old House seat and vie for the powerful post of speaker of the House.

In September, the newspaper reported that Emanuel wanted Blagojevich to appoint Cook County Commissioner Forrest Claypool to fill his soon-to-be-vacant 5th Congressional District seat. Emanuel broached the idea with the then-governor just days after last year's presidential election, the paper reported. The proposal was for Claypool to serve one or two terms, then to be considered for a spot in President Obama's Cabinet, which would give Emanuel the option of returning to Congress and making a bid for speaker, sources told the Sun-Times.

Emanuel had hoped Blagojevich had the authority to appoint someone to serve the remaining weeks of his House term before a new Congress was seated in January -- which would have given Claypool an incumbent's advantage heading into last February's special election, the sources said.

Claypool said he only briefly considered a run to fill Emanuel's seat and had no role in any plan to keep the seat warm for the top Obama aide's eventual return.

Blagojevich, it turned out, did not have the authority to appoint someone to replace Emanuel.

Claypool's fellow county Commissioner Michael Quigley ended up winning the seat in Congress.

Blagojevich was arrested Dec. 9, 2008, on charges that he'd sought to sell Obama's former U.S. Senate seat for a personal benefit -- including trying to get a presidential Cabinet post for himself. Blagojevich subsequently was impeached and booted from office.

A spokeswoman for Emanuel declined to comment on whether her boss spoke with Harris or Blagojevich about a temporary appointment -- or whether Emanuel knew that Harris had researched the issue.

Harris' lawyer, Terry Ekl, also declined to comment. Previously, Ekl has said that Harris -- who was arrested with the former governor and pleaded guilty in July to wire fraud, agreeing to testify against his old boss in exchange for a reduced sentence -- would testify truthfully against Blagojevich and that Harris never did anything to benefit himself.

The Sun-Times obtained records of the Web browser history on Harris' state computer through a Freedom of Information Act request to the office of Gov. Quinn, Blagojevich's successor. Those records also have been subpoenaed by federal investigators.

Surfing the Net, the records show, another Web site Harris visited was [www.kingmadigan.com](http://www.kingmadigan.com) -- which depicts Blagojevich's arch political enemy, Illinois House Speaker Michael Madigan, as a greedy "king" decked out in a jewel-studded gold crown.

"He has graciously used his supreme power and influence in Illinois to instill members of the Royal Family into high positions within State Government," the Web site reads.

It also describes Madigan's daughter, Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan, as the speaker's "little princess," and the speaker's wife, Shirley, as "the Queen" who heads the Illinois Arts Council, "to which King Madigan steers $20 million each year. They must need many tapestries for the castle."

The Sun-Times could not determine who's behind the Web site.

Asked about Harris' Web-surfing, Madigan spokesman Steve Brown said: "We learn almost every day these are very troubled people, and it's probably the biggest reason Illinois is in the jam it is in today. Too bad they didn't spend that much time trying to run the government efficiently."

Harris also used his state computer, the records show, to:

- Look up campaign contributions to Madigan and to Mayor Daley.

- Check prices for a Mini Cooper car on eBay.

- And research a trip to his native Greece.