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Final Edition

**Blago's plan for Senate; Gov might not be ready to quit, but he may OK letting voters fill Obama's seat**

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Should he stay in office, Gov. Blagojevich is warming to the idea of holding a special election for President-elect Barack Obama's vacant U.S. Senate seat, the Chicago Sun-Times has learned.

The governor -- facing criminal charges that he put the seat and other state-government decisions up for sale -- was optimistic at the start of the weekend that he would sign a bill that would strip him of his power to name Obama's successor, a Blagojevich source said Sunday.

The governor didn't commit to the idea, however, because he wants to make sure legislators send him a "clean bill" that would apply to future unexpected U.S. Senate vacancies -- not just the Obama seat.

Blagojevich's stance seemed to indicate he is leaning toward staying in office for the foreseeable future. The Sun-Times reported in Saturday's editions that he was expected to decide early this week whether to resign.

The governor has vacillated in recent days over what to do about his political future.

Late Sunday night, he said he would not resign, according to another person close to Blagojevich.

"He's decided not to," the source said. "He has no intention of resigning at this time." The source cautioned, however, that the governor could change his mind as he continues to contemplate his situation.

Blagojevich spent about six hours consulting with high-profile defense lawyer Ed Genson on Sunday after meeting with him for four hours Saturday.

Blagojevich is expected to make his first public remarks in upcoming days, the source said.

Today, Blagojevich will be in Chicago, where he is expected to sign legislation that renews tax incentives to lure movie producers to Illinois. But the General Assembly is to convene in Springfield for a drama of a different sort.

Lawmakers plan to discuss the special-election issue -- as well as impeaching Blagojevich -- during a legislative session called to respond to the governor's alleged criminal wrongdoing.

Besides possible impeachment, Attorney General Lisa Madigan has asked the Illinois Supreme Court to declare the governor unfit to hold office.

Lt. Gov. Pat Quinn -- who is next in line to succeed the governor -- told the Sun-Times he'd had no contact with Blagojevich or his staff over the weekend. Besides resigning, Quinn said Blagojevich has the option of giving up his powers as governor while still keeping the title and presumably his paycheck.

"The governor can voluntarily step aside," Quinn said. "I would become the acting governor. He would still retain the title. . . . That might be something they're exploring."

How to stop the governor from having the sole authority to appoint a successor to the Obama seat is expected to take center stage alongside the Blagojevich political death watch. Under draft legislation circulated Friday, lawmakers would authorize special elections for the Obama seat and for the congressional seat of incoming White House chief of staff Rahm Emanuel, who has yet to formally surrender his elected post.

The package would enable whomever is governor to appoint a temporary successor to Obama until election results become final.

On Sunday, Quinn praised that component.

"There will be momentous decisions in Washington the first 100 days, and I don't think Illinois should be without two senators," he said.

Primary and general elections for the posts would either be Feb. 24 and April 7 or April 7 and May 26, depending on whether the law takes effect Jan. 1 or later. The law would expire Jan. 1, 2010 -- a provision that could put it at loggerheads with Blagojevich.

Steve Brown, a spokesman for House Speaker Michael Madigan, had not been briefed on the bill and could not comment on specifics.

"I don't know if I'd even call that the final version," Brown said of the draft obtained by the Sun-Times.

A spokesman for House Minority Leader Tom Cross (R-Oswego), who expects to meet with Madigan possibly today, endorsed the package that was making the rounds.

"We feel the best way to restore any confidence the citizens of Illinois have in their government overall and in particular who the United States senator will be is to have a special election. The very preliminary language we've seen seems to accomplish that task," Cross spokesman David Dring said.

The state Republican Party ratcheted up its focus Sunday on the proposal by unleashing a statewide cable-television campaign and mounting a phone-lobbying pitch throughout Illinois.