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Final Edition

**Gov's pick faces a fight; Obama against Blagojevich's surprise decision, Senate Democrats say they won't seat Burris**

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Staff reporters

Gov. Blagojevich shocked the nation Tuesday by naming one of Illinois' most well-known black political figures to fill President-elect Barack Obama's vacant U.S. Senate seat.

The embattled governor's appointment of former state comptroller and attorney general Roland Burris drew rebukes from Senate Democratic leaders in Washington, who vowed to stop Burris from being seated, and Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White, who said he would not sign Burris' appointment papers.

Later in the day, the president-elect weighed in against the move.

"Roland Burris is a good man and a fine public servant, but the Senate Democrats made it clear weeks ago that they cannot accept an appointment made by a governor who is accused of selling this very Senate seat," Obama said in a statement. "The best resolution would be for the governor to resign his office and allow a lawful and appropriate process of succession."

Despite all the tough talk about the governor's move, it was unclear how efforts to stop Blagojevich would work. The news of the governor's appointment was first reported by the Chicago Sun-Times.

Blagojevich has resisted calls to resign since his Dec. 9 arrest on corruption charges, and a 1969 U.S. Supreme Court case appears to give Burris the right to join the 111th Congress on Jan. 6.

But Senate Democrats in Washington were poised to invoke rarely used powers to thwart Burris, setting the stage for a potential legal showdown.

Race also could become an issue. Rep. Bobby Rush (D-Ill.) joined Blagojevich and Burris at their joint news conference Tuesday, making an impassioned plea to his Senate counterparts to let Burris take office so at least one member is African American.

"He will be a great United States senator," Blagojevich said of Burris. "Please don't let the allegations against me taint this good and honest man."

Burris gave no idea what his strategy might be to avoid being blocked by Senate leadership. "I'm honored that I have been appointed, and we will deal with the next step in the process," he said.

Burris said Blagojevich contacted him about the seat on Sunday night. But Burris apparently wasn't the governor's first choice. One of the governor's criminal defense lawyers, Sam Adam Jr., approached Rep. Danny K. Davis (D-Ill.) about the seat on Christmas Eve, Davis said. Davis turned down the job on Friday.

Earlier this month, one of Blagojevich's criminal defense lawyers, Edward Genson, had suggested that the governor would leave the seat vacant. At Tuesday's news conference, Blagojevich declined to answer questions about Genson's statement.

"I am required to make this appointment," he said. "If I don't make this appointment, then the people of Illinois will be deprived of their appropriate voice and vote in the United States Senate."

Burris, his lobbying firm, his clients and a law firm that includes him donated $127,986 to Blagojevich since the governor took office. Burris himself gave $4,500 to the governor, including $1,000 last June. His lobbying firm, Burris & Lebed Consulting, gave $10,796 in cash and services. The law firm with which Burris is affiliated kicked in $5,000 for the governor. Burris' consulting firm has gotten $294,546.30 in state contracts under Blagojevich.

Burris' lobbying clients -- which were under contract with the state for $3.09 million while he represented them -- contributed $107,690 for the governor.

Dozens of elected officials decried Blagojevich's move as potential impeachment efforts against him move forward.

"There is a constitutional crisis brewing both here in Illinois and in Washington over this appointment for no good reason other than Rod Blagojevich's own bloated ego," said Rep. Lou Lang (D-Skokie), a member of the House impeachment panel.

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