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Final Edition

**Impeached**

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Staff reporters

SPRINGFIELD-On what would have been Richard Nixon's 95th birthday, the Illinois House voted 114-1 on Friday to impeach Gov. Blagojevich, making him the first chief executive in the state's 190-year history to face such an action.

"We wanted him. We elected him. We supported him. And he's disgraced us," said Rep. Monique Davis (D-Chicago).

Blagojevich's political fate will be decided by the state Senate in a trial set to begin Jan. 26. If 40 of 59 senators vote to convict Blagojevich, he will be removed from office and barred from holding elected position again.

For nearly 90 minutes, House members solemnly laid out a list of transgressions by Blagojevich that they said warranted his impeachment -- from his alleged offer to sell the state's vacant U.S. Senate seat to the highest bidder, to his alleged extortion of a children's hospital for a campaign contribution from its CEO, to his $2.6 million expenditure for imported flu vaccines that never reached Illinois and had to be thrown out.

"Today, we are taking the first step in taking back our government from the darkness and bringing it back to the light. The plague -- it is a plague that has been brought on our state by Rod Blagojevich -- will be lifted," said Rep. Jack Franks (D-Woodstock).

Republicans, for the most part, were subdued during debate as only House Minority Leader Tom Cross (R-Oswego) and Rep. Jim Durkin (R-Western Springs) spoke in favor of the governor's impeachment.

"That trust he was given by being elected twice has eroded, evaporated, is completely gone," Cross said.

The governor, donning a black jogging suit, ignored the litany of complaints against his performance and his character, opting to go for a jog in his Northwest Side neighborhood.

Calling his impeachment a "foregone conclusion" at a news conference later, Blagojevich said he was the victim of his efforts pushing hard against the House for health care, property tax relief and the expansion of a breast and cervical cancer program. The cancer program was important "so we can save lives and keep moms alive to care for their children," he said. "The House failed to act."

He quoted Alfred Lord Tennyson, told the now-familiar story of his mother's and immigrant father's struggle and again denied any wrongdoing.

"I took actions with the advice of lawyers and experts to find ways -- creative ways -- to use the executive authority of a governor to get real things done for people who rely on us," he said. "And in many cases, the things we did for people have literally saved lives. I don't believe those are impeachable offenses."

Next Wednesday, the governor and state senators will be in the uncomfortable position of facing one another in Springfield when Blagojevich fulfills his constitutional duty to gavel in the state Senate for the beginning of the 96th General Assembly. On that same day, senators could be sworn in as jurors for his trial later this month.

The only House member to vote against the impeachment resolution was state Rep. Milton Patterson (D-Chicago), who said there "wasn't enough" evidence to merit driving Blagojevich from office.

Rep. Elga Jefferies (D-Chicago), a lame duck, was the lone present vote. And Rep. Ken Dunkin (D-Chicago), an ally of the governor's, was a no-show for today's vote.

House Majority Leader Barbara Flynn Currie (D-Chicago), chairwoman of the House panel that recommended impeachment, said the evidence was overwhelming.

"This governor has breached the public trust. This governor must be impeached," she said.

The normally noisy House chamber was uncharacteristically still as one legislator after another began to write his legacy -- as one of the state's most corrupt leaders.

"Rod Blagojevich, you should be ashamed of yourself. But I won't pretend to think you feel any. You've already shown us you have none," said Rep. Susana Mendoza (D-Chicago). "So take your silly place in history, and I hope your fate serves as a notice for any other public official who even has a fleeting thought of following your example, that they will be held accountable as well."