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**Blago's $2.3 million hit list; Document shows ex-gov targeted about 150 people for campaign cash**

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Four potential candidates for President Obama's vacant Senate seat were each to be targeted for contributions by ex-Gov. Rod Blagojevich's campaign as part of an aggressive, $2.3 million race for cash late last year, an internal campaign document obtained by the Chicago Sun-Times shows.

The four were among about 150 people targeted for contributions by the Friends of Blagojevich campaign organization by the end of 2008, when a new Illinois law took effect that bans taking money from state contractors and appointees, the document shows.

Sources also said Blagojevich was worried at the time about his growing legal bills.

Blagojevich -- booted out of office by the Illinois Legislature after being charged in December with trying to sell an appointment to the Senate seat, among other crimes -- has maintained he is innocent of those charges and never tried to sell the seat.

Still, the list created by his campaign organization shows that, during the time he was deciding on a Senate replacement for Obama, Blagojevich targeted billionaire J.B. Pritzker, Rep. Jan Schakowsky, Rep. Luis Gutierrez and Roland Burris, the man he ultimately appointed, to approach for contributions. All were reported to be under consideration for the Senate post.

Federal investigators used an early version of the list to obtain permission to install secret wiretaps that provided key evidence to charge Blagojevich.

An emissary for a fifth candidate for the Senate seat, Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr., was also on the list, as were two others who were being discussed as possibilities for the Senate seat -- Chicago Park District board President Gery Chico and former Blagojevich spokeswoman Cheryle Jackson.

Chico, who held a campaign fund-raiser for Blagojevich the day before his arrest, said he wasn't interested in the appointment. Cheryle Jackson said at the time she wasn't interested but now is considering a run for the Senate seat. Gutierrez took himself out of the running in late November. Burris has said there was no "pay-to-play" involved in his appointment.

The Blagojevich campaign target list was first created in September. The Sun-Times obtained an updated version, dated Dec. 3 -- six days before his arrest.

It's likely to be part of an indictment of the ex-governor, which could be made public this week.

Many on the list said they had no idea they were on it. Among them: Pritzker, targeted for $100,000.

"They may have had him on the list," Pritzker spokesman Dave Lundy said. "But they had a lot of quirky ideas that didn't have a basis in reality."

The list includes a broad range of fund-raising targets, from White Sox and Bulls chairman Jerry Reinsdorf to onetime Cleveland Browns quarterback Bernie Kosar to promoters of mixed martial arts, which Blagojevich legalized in Illinois in 2008.

The FBI obtained an early version of the list in October, after former Blagojevich friend and aide John Wyma began cooperating with authorities investigating the governor. It was key to prosecutors' successful effort to win extraordinary court approval to wiretap the governor's home phone and to bug his campaign office.

The subsequent recordings opened up a new avenue of investigation -- into allegations that Blagojevich sought to sell the Senate appointment.

Through an attorney, Blagojevich said Friday that Gutierrez helped organize a Dec. 5 fund-raiser but that the congressman was out of the running for the seat at that time. Listed as "Hispanic event" on Blagojevich campaign records, the fund-raiser took in $16,000.

"The congressman played no role in organizing the event, his name was not on the invitation, and he did not contribute any money," Gutierrez spokeswoman Rebecca Dreilinger said.

Schakowsky said Friday she never was asked to give to Blagojevich. "The empty space next to my name speaks volumes and shows that Blagojevich knew better than to approach me," Schakowsky said.

The race for cash came as Blagojevich could see federal charges looming and his legal bills mounting, according to knowledgeable sources.

Zell and Reinsdorf were each to be asked for $50,000 in contributions or fund-raising, the campaign list shows.

A Zell spokeswoman has said he wasn't asked to give in those final months of last year. During that time, Tribune Co., which Zell heads, was seeking state help on a deal to sell Wrigley Field.

Reinsdorf did not contribute in that period but might have asked others to do so on his behalf, a source said. Said Reinsdorf: "Contributions to candidates are a matter of public record, and I have routinely donated to numerous members of both parties over the years."

The list includes at least half a dozen people Blagojevich had appointed to state boards or other state posts. Illinois Finance Authority Chairman Bill Brandt was targeted to raise $25,000 at a fund-raiser Dec. 17 -- after Blagojevich's arrest. Brandt's spokesman said the event never took place.

Niranjan Shah, reappointed by Blagojevich in November to the University of Illinois board, was to hold a Dec. 12 fund-raiser. Records show $22,000 was collected beforehand: "rec'vd 22 from 25 for 12/12 event. Extra coming." The fund-raiser ended up not being held. "Of course not," Shah said Friday. "The guy was arrested three days before."

Michael Ettinger, a lawyer for the former governor's brother, Robert Blagojevich, who headed his campaign fund, said the list "was a preliminary outline of who might have fund-raisers and what we might be able to expect from them. It was like a guide, their initial draft of a plan on how to raise funds for the end of the reporting period, Dec. 31."

In court documents, federal authorities have said Blagojevich, in some cases, shook down people for contributions in exchange for official actions.