



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on June 28, 2011

Former Illinois Governor Blagojevich Convicted on Corruption Charges

Blagojevich is the second consecutive Illinois Governor sent to jail for corruption, following his predecessor George Ryan, who is now serving a six and one-half-year term in federal prison. However, Blagojevich is the first Illinois Governor to be impeached and removed from office, after he was charged with trying to use his office for personal gain.



In 2010 Blagojevich was first convicted of lying to the FBI in the case, but jurors were deadlocked on the other counts, leading to the retrial. This time it took the jury of 11 women and one man two weeks to sift through all the evidence and testimony and reach verdicts on the 18 charges.

Some of the convictions call for up to 20 years in prison, news reports said — up to 300 years by some accounts — but legal experts said Blagojevich would probably spend around 10 years in jail, and no more than 15.

“Patti and I are obviously disappointed,” Blagojevich said, speaking of his wife who appeared distraught at the verdict. He added that there was not much more to say “other than we want to get home to our little girls and talk to them and explain things to them and try to sort things out.” Later, at his home, Blagojevich reflected on his disgraced political career, telling reporters: “Let the people know I fought real hard for them.”

While Blagojevich faced choruses of boos from crowds as he left the courthouse, Sam Adams, Jr., a defense attorney from his first trial, said the former Governor’s legal team looked forward to an appeal. “We’ve always believed in Rod,” Adams told Chicago radio station [WLS](#). “We’ve always believed in his innocence.” Adams told reporters that Blagojevich’s defense attorneys will base the appeal, in part, on wiretap recordings disallowed in the trial — tapes they say will prove the former Governor’s true motives. “That’s going be a major part of the appeal in this case,” Adam was quoted by UPI as saying. “I didn’t see them proving the 17 counts.”

Adams was referring to profanity-laced recordings in which Blagojevich appeared to equate Mr. Obama’s vacant Senate seat with personal gain, a revelation that threatened to taint the new Obama administration. But in the trial, former White House Chief of Staff Emanuel, now Chicago’s Mayor, testified that the President never promised anything to Blagojevich.

During the trial Blagojevich’s defense team was forced to put him on the witness stand, which may have proven costly to his case. Reported [AP News](#) of the former Governor’s testimony, “Blagojevich seemed to believe he could talk his way out of trouble from the witness stand. Indignant one minute, laughing the next, seemingly in tears once, he endeavored to counteract the blunt, greedy man he appeared to be



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on FBI wiretaps.”

He even apologized to the jurors for swearing on the tapes, telling them, “When I hear myself swearing like that, I am a f*****g jerk.”

Trying to evoke sympathy from the jurors, he recounted growing up in a working-class neighborhood and tried to portray himself as a politician who was in touch with the needs of working people and the elderly.

As for the damning wiretaps, he testified that his words “merely displayed his approach to decision-making,” reported AP: “to invite a whirlwind of ideas ‘good ones, bad ones, stupid ones’ — then toss the ill-conceived ones out.” When the prosecution read wiretap transcripts in which Blagojevich seemed to clearly express his intention of trading Mr. Obama’s Senate seat for a job, Blagojevich explained to jurors, “I see what I say here, but that’s not what I meant.”

But Richard Kling, a professor at Chicago-Kent College of Law who observed the trial, told AP News that Blagojevich’s testimony “reminded me of a little kid who gets his hand caught in a cookie jar. He says, ‘Mommy I wasn’t taking the cookies. I was just trying to protect them and to count them.’”

In the end, the jurors were reminded by the prosecution that Blagojevich was a convicted liar, and found that the evidence against him was overwhelming. Jury members interviewed after the trial said that they listened and re-listened to recordings of Blagojevich’s phone conversations — evidence they ultimately found compelling for the prosecution. And while they found the former Governor personable — even likable — when they listened to him on the witness stand, he still came across as manipulative. “Our verdict shows that we didn’t believe it,” one juror concluded.

After the verdict the prosecutor, U.S. Attorney Patrick Fitzgerald, told reporters that the jury had sent “a loud and clear message that Governor Blagojevich committed very serious crimes shaking down a children’s hospital, trying to sell a Senate seat, and demanding cash campaign contributions in advance before signing a bill. This is a bittersweet moment.”

Illinois Governor Pat Quinn, who was Lieutenant Governor during Blagojevich’s administration and who succeeded him in office, called the conviction “a serious day for our state.” He said that Blagojevich’s conviction, as well as that of Governor George Ryan, “underlines, I think, for every person in Illinois, the importance of reforming our government on a daily basis from top to bottom.” Quinn said that since being sworn into office “that’s exactly what I’ve tried to do every day I’ve been in office. This is my mission, to reform our government, so we do not have governors going to jail.”

The Democratic Governor, who once defended his predecessor as a person of honesty and integrity, said he thought “Rod Blagojevich deceived and misled lots and lots of people in Illinois, the voters included. I think he deceived everyone. He didn’t follow what he was saying in public [with] what he did in private.”

Pat Brady, chairman of the Illinois Republican Party, took Blagojevich’s conviction as an opportunity to tweak the state Democratic Party (apparently forgetting that Governor Ryan was a Republican): “This closes only one chapter of Democrat corruption in Illinois. Illinois Democratic politicians who now try everything they can to hide their past support of Rod Blagojevich should look themselves in the mirror and remind themselves that little has changed since the day Blagojevich was arrested.”

Photo of Rod Blagojevich: AP Images



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