



[Print](#) | [Close this window](#)

UPDATE 5-Blagojevich ousted as Illinois governor

Fri Jan 30, 2009 2:40am GMT

(Adds Obama comments, paragraph 8)

By Andrew Stern and Michael Conlon

CHICAGO, Jan 29 (Reuters) - Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich was removed from office on Thursday after the state Senate unanimously convicted him on impeachment charges, including an accusation he tried to sell the U.S. Senate seat once held by President Barack Obama.

The Illinois Senate, acting as a jury, voted 59-0 to oust the second-term Democrat immediately. The lawmakers also voted by the same margin to bar him from ever holding public office again in America's fifth most populous state.

Before the vote, members of the Senate, where Democrats outnumber Republicans 37-22, called Blagojevich "devious," "cynical," "crass," "corrupt," "inept," "a liar," "a hypocrite" and "irresponsible."

Blagojevich had pleaded with the body hours earlier, asking, "How can you throw a governor out of office who is clamoring and begging and pleading with you to give him a chance to bring witnesses in to prove his innocence? ... A crime has not been proven here."

He later told reporters outside his Chicago home he was "saddened and disappointed but not at all surprised" by what happened. "It was a fixed deal from the beginning."

Blagojevich skipped the chance to make a formal defense during the proceedings because, he said, the rules restricted him from calling the witnesses he needed or playing in full the federal government wiretapped conversations that led to charges involving Obama's Senate seat.

Democratic Lieutenant Governor Patrick Quinn was sworn in as governor almost immediately, saying, "The ordeal is over" and urging people to "to make the sacrifices necessary to address the serious challenges we have before us: The integrity challenge, the challenge of our economy, the challenge of making sure that we pay our bills."

Obama pledged full cooperation with the new governor, saying in a statement: "Today ends a painful episode for Illinois. For months, the state had been crippled by a crisis of leadership. Now that cloud has lifted."

Quinn has expressed concerns about the state's budget ills, about which he says he has been told little, and a 7.6 percent unemployment rate that is above the national average.

Blagojevich has not been indicted on criminal charges. The security detail assigned to him as governor left his Chicago home immediately after he became an ex-governor.

PATTERN OF CORRUPTION

Blagojevich's arrest drew attention to a pattern of political corruption in Illinois, becoming a distraction for the incoming Obama administration, which operated its presidential transition office in Obama's home state.

The governor's impeachment was unprecedented in Illinois and he joined only seven other state chief executives to be convicted after impeachment. Arizona's Evan Mecham in 1988 became the first governor impeached since the 1920s and, like Blagojevich, the Republican said his accusers were politically motivated.

Blagojevich was among four of Illinois' past eight governors hit by criminal charges. His immediate predecessor, Republican George Ryan, is in prison after being convicted of corruption charges.

"Clearing this up may give the state some room to focus on its pressing financial and economic challenges," said Ted Hampton, a Moody's Investors Service analyst.

Those challenges included underfunded pensions, a large employee benefit burden, cash-flow troubles and an ailing economy, he said.

"Whoever is governor needs to get together with the Legislature to fix the budget," said John Kenward, an analyst at Standard & Poor's Ratings Services, which has the state's "AA" rating on a watch list for a possible downgrade.

On Monday, a spokesman for the governor's budget office said the state's current deficit was \$2.5 billion. But the state comptroller's office said the situation was likely worse as Illinois' unpaid bill backlog stands at \$2.1 billion. (Additional reporting by Karen Pierog; Editing by Peter Cooney)

© Thomson Reuters 2008. All rights reserved. Users may download and print extracts of content from this website for their own personal and non-commercial use only. Republication or redistribution of Thomson Reuters content, including by framing or similar means, is expressly prohibited without the prior written consent of Thomson Reuters. Thomson Reuters and its logo are registered trademarks or trademarks of the Thomson Reuters group of companies around the world.

Thomson Reuters journalists are subject to an Editorial Handbook which requires fair presentation and disclosure of relevant interests.