

BURRIS: WHY NOT WITHHOLD COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS?

There's been a lot of discussion about whether or not the Senate has the ability to refuse to seat Roland Burris—the guy Rod Blagojevich appointed to replace Obama. I see some merit on both sides, but above all, I see an awfully weird time to purport to discipline and rule of law.

That said, perhaps there is a reasonable solution which is entirely in line with other moves the Senate has made of late: seating Burris, but refusing to give him any committee assignments in the Senate, at least pending some resolution of Blagojevich's affairs.

When long-serving Toobz Stevens was indicted, the Republicans took away his committee assignments. When Larry Craig got caught being gay, the Republicans took away his committee assignments. (Somehow, David Vitter's solicitation of a prostitute didn't require he lose his committee assignments.)

While, in both cases, the Senate chose not to move to expel the Senators, pulling committee assignments was a way pull the perks of the seat in an attempt to convince the Senator to resign. While both retained a vote, they lost any real influence in the Senate.

Burris would, of course, have a means to get committee assignments: he could caucus with the Republicans, if they would have him. Which would make it a lot harder for Burris to run as an incumbent Democrat in 2010. Not necessarily a bad thing, IMO.

Maybe a week hanging out with the family has made me all Solomonic, but withholding all committee assignments from Burris seems like a sound way to discourage him from sticking around with a tainted—but (by all appearances) legally

sound appointment.