

# ROLAND BURRIS: “FRED IS DYING ON THE VINE”

I’m just now catching up to the Roland Burris-Rob Blagojevich transcript that got released earlier this week, in which the wannabe Senator from Illinois scrambles to find a way to pay off the Blago machine in time for the Senate decision.

I’m most struck by the centrality of Fred Lebed, then Burris’ law partner, to the discussion. That’s because we’ve got several pieces of evidence that Lebed would be—and might have been—at the center of a quid pro quo between Burris and Blago.

RobBlago mentions Lebed when he first raises the issue of “anything you might be able to do.”

BLAGOJEVICH: We’ve had a number of conversations about, you know, anything you might be able to do; you and Fred might be able to do here before the end of the year for Rod.

And when Burris suggests he’ll have to do a fundraiser, he alludes to conversations with Lebed about the appearance that would give.

BURRIS: So let, it is and so if I put on a fundraiser now ...

BLAGOJEVICH: Mm hm.

BURRIS: ... and, I, you know I, I think it would have something ... this is what I’ve been talking to Fred about it, it has so many negative connotations that Burris is trying to buy an appointment ...

Burris then tries to buy time by explaining that Lebed is on a business trip to NY (Tim Wright is the lawyer who represented Burris in his appearance before the State Legislature, and who was giving him detailed directions on how to

respond to questions about contacts with the Blago people, which makes his appearance in this context interesting unto itself).

BURRIS: And, and my law partner we were gonna try to do something at the law firm. I might be able to do this in the name of Tim Wright.

BLAGOJEVICH: Mm hm.

BURRIS: Okay, 'cause Tim is not looking for an appointment, okay.

BLAGOJEVICH: Okay.

BURRIS: So if I can talk to my law partner who's been, you know, in New York trying to drum up business.

[snip]

BURRIS: I think he'll be back in on Monday.

BLAGOJEVICH: Okay.

BURRIS: But, ah, but Fred and I, look I said I gotta call you. I have, I have not.

BLAGOJEVICH: Okay.

BURRIS: 'Cause I didn't know how to deal with this situation.

BLAGOJEVICH: ell, ah, you know I'll stand by. I mean if you wanna write a check and have Fred write a check or have someone else write checks, that'd be great. I mean ...

Burriss then describes Lebed looking for another lawyers' fundraiser for Blago to piggy-back onto.

BURRIS Yeah, right 'cause, ah, and once Fred found out he had done one, we thought maybe we could hook on with him, but he had done his.

When RobBlago rather touchingly cedes to Burris' conscience, he names Lebed directly.

BLAGOJEVICH: I, I can't help you with your dilemma other than want to encourage you to, ...

BURRIS: Sure, sure.

BLAGOJEVICH: ... to do what you think is fair from your standpoint ...

BURRIS: Okay.

BLAGOJEVICH: ... and Fred's standpoint and ya know, I'll work with you. And if I can think of a place where we can tie you guys in.

And when Burris complains about the law firm going under, he describes it specifically in terms of Lebed.

BLAGOJEVICH: Okay Roland. How's your business by the way?

BURRIS: It's terrible.

BLAGOJEVICH: Is it? Shit, I'm sorry to hear that.

BURRIS: I mean, you know Fred and I we might lose Burris and Lebed because we've been trying to get contracts. We don't have any clients renewing for 09.

BLAGOJEVICH: No kidding.

BURRIS: We have no clients renewing for 09. Fred is dying on the vine because, I, you know, a lot of our clients have run out.

Though this conversation transpired between RobBlago and Burris, Lebed was clearly the central player, and Burris suggested repeatedly that Lebed would be the one to implement any favors for Blago.

That's important, first of all, because Lebed

may already have **done** a big favor for Blago. In September (after Burris first raised his interest in the Senate seat with the Blago team), a charity on the board of which Lebed served hired Patti Blagojevich to be their full time fundraising director, even though she had no experience (they fired her earlier this year). When asked about this in front of the Illinois legislature, Burris claimed he would have no idea whether his partner had a role in her hiring. This conversation, however, belies that claim.

Moreover, in March, an associate of Lebed's, John Ruff, came forward alleging that Lebed had spoken of the favors they'd have to do to pay off receiving the Senate seat. He insisted that Lebed would be the key to understanding any deal between Blago and Burris.

Ruff also recalled Lebed telling him he'd had discussions about Burris' interest in the seat with Blagojevich representatives as far back as October. That claim by Ruff contradicts what Burris said in a Jan. 5 sworn statement that is now part of a state perjury investigation.

[snip]

Ruff is adamant that if prosecutors want to get to the bottom of whether Burris perjured himself, Lebed could be a key.

"There is more to be discovered," Ruff said. "I know the key to finding the information out is through Fred. That's the main point I wish to get across."

Ruff's contention perfectly accords with what we see in this conversation—any deal would have been struck not just between Burris and Blago, but Burris and Lebed and Blago.

Now, clearly, the job for Patti Blago was not enough to win Blago's favor—at least not before Blago realized he was tapped. And that job

doesn't come up in this transcript. Still.  
Burriss' claim that he would have been out of the  
loop of any efforts Lebed made to get Patti  
Blago hired rings false, given this transcript.