

BLAGO GOES QUIETLY INTO THE NIGHT

Remember when Rod Blagojevich was making all kinds of noise about calling Barack Obama, Rahm Emanuel, Durbin and Reid, Valerie Jarrett and taking the witness grand stand himself to tell his side of the story in his defense to the criminal prosecution by Pat Fitzgerald and his NDIL team of prosecutors?

Well all the Blago fireworks were duds, most precluded by a strict trial judge, James Zagel, through granting prosecution motions to preclude. And then, a little over a week ago, came the crushing blow that even Hot Rod himself would not take the stand in his own defense.

Standing before a crush of reporters, cameras and microphones, Rod Blagojevich said he wanted to take the stand in his defense but instead took the advice of his attorney Sam Adam Sr., who convinced him the prosecution hadn't proved its corruption case.

"I felt all along and believed all along that I was going to testify," he said in the lobby of the federal courthouse.

The former governor said the government's case wasn't as they presented it, noting prosecutors didn't call witnesses Antoin "Tony" Rezko and Stuart Levine, both convicted in the federal probe.

With Adam disagreeing with his son Sam Adam Jr. over his testimony, Blagojevich said he picked the elder attorney's advice.

"Sam Junior still at this moment wanted me to testify and, frankly, so did I," Blagojevich said.

He said the decision was discussed late into Monday night.

“Sam Adam Sr.’s most compelling argument – and ultimately the one that swayed me – was that the government in their case proved my innocence,” he said. “They proved I did nothing illegal and that there was nothing further for us to add.

The anticipated Blago fireworks fizzled so badly that the media have taken to calling it a “victory” for Democrats just in order to find something – anything – to talk about for their coverage:

“They dodged a bullet because it would have been weeks of dragging in these high-level people and talking about the schemes and all that,” Illinois GOP chairman Pat Brady said.

Blagojevich’s attorneys had plastered Washington and Illinois with subpoenas. Besides Emanuel, Reid and Giannoulas, his lawyers also initially wanted Obama adviser Valerie Jarrett and Illinois Sen. Dick Durbin to appear. They even wanted to subpoena Obama, but weren’t allowed to by a judge.

That none of them ended up testifying doesn’t mean Republicans will let voters forget that Blagojevich is a Democrat as they try to pry loose the party’s grip on the Senate seat and Illinois state government.

And other issues, like Illinois’ \$13 billion deficit, help mitigate the damage of the Blagojevich trial, said DePaul University political science professor Michael Mezey.

“It’s going to be yesterday’s news by the time election season starts Labor Day,” he said.

I am not sure this is any big “victory” for Democrats, but there is some merit to the

thought that Blago is just such a goofball that he will not be that much of a drain on Illinois Dems in the upcoming election. Especially when one of the top of the ticket candidates there, Democratic Senate candidate Alexi Giannoulias has his own issues to keep the Chitown media hopping.

The fascinating thing here is how hollow the entire Blago defense turned out to be. When I use the term "defense" that would be rather loosely because there was no defense case presented. At all. Now it is never easy for a defense attorney to put his client on the stand, and it is rarely a good idea. That logic probably maintains here; actually it almost undoubtedly maintains here with a wildcard like Blagojevich.

But to have left the jurors with no defense case whatsoever after all the bluster, sturm and drang? That is brutal, and no matter how Blago and his attorneys paint it, it is throwing in the towel and moving the focus to an appeal. There is simply no other way to look at it. Despite all the noise and antics, Blago has gone quietly into the night.

The only thing left is to receive the verdict. Today, Judge Zagel denied the obligatory defense motion for a mistrial that is made when the defense knows they are sunk. Zagel also denied a request from the jury for transcripts of the closing argument by the prosecution. Probably not a good sign for the defendant when the jury wants more of the prosecution's closing.

There is little, if any, reason to expect anything but a guilty verdict on most, if not all, counts. The only question is when the verdict will come down. Today is Friday and the jury has been out since Wednesday. Juries like to wrap things up and not have to come back after weekends, so there is a very decent chance we will have a verdict today. If and when it comes down, this post will be updated with the verdict.