



Sen. Roland Burris, D-Ill., returns to his office after a meeting with Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., Tuesday, Feb. 24, 2009, on Capitol Hill in Washington. (AP Photo/Lauren Victoria Burke)



## Burris refuses to resign despite plea from Durbin

By LAURIE KELLMAN – 12 hours ago

WASHINGTON (AP) — Sen. Roland Burris refused to resign on Tuesday, rebuffing a call from the Senate's No. 2 Democrat, who argued that the embattled Illinois lawmaker has little hope next year of winning the seat vacated by President Barack Obama.

"I told him that under the circumstances, I would resign," fellow Illinois Sen. Richard Durbin told reporters after an hour-long meeting with Burris. "He said, 'I'm not going to resign.'"

"I can't force him," Durbin added.

Burris, also a Democrat, was appointed by disgraced former Gov. Rod Blagojevich, who was impeached and driven from office after he was accused of trying to sell the Senate seat.

Burris repeatedly changed his story about how he was appointed. He is facing calls for his resignation after he admitted trying to raise money for Blagojevich.

"I did nothing wrong, Jesse. I did nothing wrong," Burris told Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr., D-Ill., as the two shook hands at Obama's address to Congress. Jackson sought the Senate seat until his name surfaced in the probe of Blagojevich. He denies promising anything to Blagojevich in return.

Only a few hours earlier, Durbin made it as plain during an hour-long private meeting that he felt Burris should resign, that Democrats are concerned about the reports surrounding his appointment and that Burris would have a hard time serving constituents under the circumstances.

Burris left through a side door and was briefly trapped by reporters as he waited for an elevator. He said he had been ordered not to comment other than to say the session was a "great discussion."

Burris has faced intense pressure from all quarters, from politicians to home state newspapers to black ministers clamoring for him to step down. Illinois Gov. Pat Quinn said last week Burris should resign for the good of the state, arguing that the controversy surrounding his appointment has cast a shadow over his service in the Senate.

In their meeting, Durbin said he told Burris that support among other Democrats was eroding because of Burris' shifting account of whether he tried to raise money for Blagojevich.

And in the careful language of the Senate, Durbin said he made clear that if Burris tried to run for the seat next year, he would not have much — if any — support from Senate Democrats. Consistent with a Senate appointment, Burris would have to win the seat outright next year.

"I asked him if he would be a candidate in 2010 and he said he had not made up his mind," Durbin said. "I told him I thought it would be extremely difficult for him to be successful in a primary or a general election under the circumstances."

The conversation followed Burris' exchange earlier in the day with Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., on the Senate floor.

"I said, 'How was your break?' He said, 'Fine. How was yours?'" Reid told reporters afterward. "I said, 'Fine.' OK?"

Asked whether Reid thinks that Burris should resign, spokesman Jim Manley said: "That is for him to decide."

The chilliness that greeted Burris in Washington came after outright demands for his resignation in Illinois.

Burris testified in January before the Illinois House committee that recommended Blagojevich's impeachment that he hadn't had contact with key Blagojevich staffers or offered anything in return for the seat. Blagojevich faces charges of trying to sell Obama's former Senate seat, though he denies wrongdoing.

But just more than a week ago, Burris released an affidavit saying he had spoken to several Blagojevich advisers, including Robert Blagojevich, the former governor's brother and finance

chairman, who Burris said called three times last fall asking for fundraising help.

He changed his story again last week when he admitted trying, unsuccessfully, to raise money for Blagojevich.

Illinois lawmakers have asked local prosecutors to look into perjury charges, and a preliminary Senate Ethics Committee inquiry is under way. Even the White House said last week that Burris should take the weekend to consider his future.

"The national Democrats needed his vote, but they found that he hung them out to dry," said Kent Redfield, a political science professor at the University of Illinois in Springfield.

*Associated Press photographer Pablo Martinez Monsivais and writers Henry C. Jackson in Washington and Tammy Webber in Illinois contributed to this report.*

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