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Burris bows out of 2010 Senate race

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By [Andrew Stern](#)

CHICAGO (Reuters) - Senator Roland Burris, whose appointment to fill Barack Obama's vacant seat was tainted by scandal, said on Friday he would not seek a full term in 2010, citing an unwillingness to raise campaign cash as the reason.

Burris' seat has especially strategic importance because his Democratic Party controls 60 of the 100 Senate seats, the minimum required to avoid opposition filibusters that could tie up key parts of President's Obama's legislative agenda.

Few analysts gave Burris, the only black in the Senate, much chance of winning his party's primary. Democrats have largely snubbed Burris since he was appointed by now disgraced Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich.

Blagojevich was later arrested on corruption charges, including scheming to sell Obama's senate seat.

Burris had raised little money for what will likely be an expensive contest to become Illinois' junior senator.

Decrying the cost of running for office, Burris told a group of Chicago activists that he "was called to choose between spending my time raising funds, or spending my time raising issues for my state. I believe that the business of the people of Illinois should always come first."

Fellow Democrats, including Obama, had opposed Burris' appointment, but some black lawmakers came to his defense, arguing that he was being unfairly tainted by his ties to Blagojevich in what they described as a public "lynching."

He was ultimately seated by a reluctant Senate Democratic leadership.

Impeached and ousted from office in January, Blagojevich was indicted in April on racketeering and other charges, accused of trying to extort campaign contributions. He has pleaded not guilty and is scheduled to go on trial next year.

RELIABLE

Burris has been a reliable Democratic vote during his seven months in office. But investigations into his statements about what role he played in Blagojevich's fund-raising efforts have kept him under a cloud.

A former Illinois attorney general and the first black elected to statewide office, Burris would have been the weakest candidate in next year's Senate race in the state, said Kent Redfield of the University of Illinois at Springfield.

Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan, seen as the strongest potential Democratic candidate, withdrew from consideration earlier this week.

"It makes it an open race," Redfield said. "It's going to focus on Obama's performance as president more than on side issues of who's tied to Blagojevich, or the side issues of Burris and race."

Illinois Republicans may have a chance to reclaim the open Senate seat and the governorship, given the corruption scandal and a budget crisis in a state where Democrats have governed with comfortable majorities in recent years, Redfield said.

There have been conflicting reports that U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, a five-term Illinois Republican, will run for the seat.

Among the Democrats interested in the seat are Illinois Treasurer Alexi Giannoulias, a banking scion who is one of Obama's friends; Chicago Urban League president Cheryle Jackson, the black former spokeswoman for Blagojevich; and Chris Kennedy, manager of the Merchandise Mart office building and a son of the late Senator Robert Kennedy.

(Additional reporting by Tom Ferraro; Editing by Paul Simao)

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