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## Blagojevich book offers his side

By Judy Keen, USA TODAY

CHICAGO — In the past nine months, [Rod Blagojevich](#) has been charged with trying to sell the U.S. Senate seat vacated by [Barack Obama](#), impeached and ousted as Illinois governor, mocked by comics and relegated to singing [Elvis Presley's](#) *Treat Me Nice* at a neighborhood festival to earn some money.

In *The Governor*, a memoir in stores today, and in an hour-long interview with USA TODAY, [Blagojevich](#) presents a very different portrait of himself: He's an innocent man, a victim of an overzealous federal prosecutor and the betrayals of former political allies. From his perspective, he's not a disgraced politician; he's caught up in a miscarriage of justice because he was trying to fight for his constituents.

His situation, Blagojevich says, reminds him of a book he recently read to his 6-year-old daughter, Annie. "In *Alice in Wonderland*, Alice is looking in the looking glass and everything is upside down," he says. "So much of this story is upside down. ... I didn't do anything wrong."

He acknowledges that he's angry and worried about being sent to prison, but Blagojevich, 52, doesn't seem preoccupied with his legal woes or perturbed by the derision in newspaper columns and editorials. When he ventures alone onto a busy Michigan Avenue sidewalk, he's immediately surrounded by tourists and locals who want to shake his hand, pose for photos or shout encouragement.

"I'm not saying I'm perfect. I've made my share of mistakes, OK?" Blagojevich says. "But never, ever, ever did I ever have a motivation other than to try to do the best I could for the people of Illinois as governor, and I sacrificed my own family interests to do it."

### 'Routine' vs. 'scandal'

Blagojevich was arrested at his home before dawn on Dec. 9. At a news conference that day, U.S. Attorney [Patrick Fitzgerald](#) said the arrest stopped a political "crime spree" and that the governor's conduct would "make Lincoln roll over in his grave."

Those assertions were "a mutilation of the truth," Blagojevich says. Fitzgerald's spokesman Randall Samborn had no comment.

The Illinois General Assembly impeached Blagojevich and removed him from office on Jan. 29. Blagojevich will stand trial next year on federal corruption charges that could put him in prison for 20 years or more.

Blagojevich never dropped out of the public eye. He has done dozens of interviews and is back on the TV circuit today. He appears weekly on a Chicago radio show. He tried to go to Costa Rica for a month to appear on *I'm a Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here*, but a judge wouldn't let him leave the country. His wife, Patti, appeared on the reality TV show instead.

Blagojevich says he wasn't trying to swap the [Obama](#) Senate seat for political favors or contributions, as the charges allege. He had already decided, he says, to appoint Illinois Attorney General [Lisa Madigan](#). All he wanted in return was the support of her father, Illinois House Speaker [Michael Madigan](#), for legislation that would have created jobs and expanded health care access. It was "a routine political deal," he says.

Kent Redfield, a political science professor at the University of Illinois-Springfield, says it's too late for Blagojevich to resuscitate his reputation. "I think the judgment is pretty clear ... that he was a complete disaster (as governor) in addition to being completely corrupt," Redfield says. "He's become a sideshow."

Illinois state Rep. Jack Franks, a Democrat who sponsored a state law requiring Blagojevich to surrender book profits if he's convicted, says the memoir is filled with lies. "His legacy is one of corruption, it's one of scandal, it's one of shame," Franks says.

### 'I'm the anti-Nixon'

Blagojevich says critics will be proved wrong when hours of wiretapped conversations are heard at his trial. "I'm the anti-Nixon here," he says. "This is the anti-Watergate scandal. I'm not trying to hide anything."

The former governor's bravado fades a bit when he's asked whether he is prepared to go to prison. "I would be lying if I didn't say there's times in the middle of the night sometimes, in the witching hour, where some thoughts cross my mind and I feel fear. Of course I do," he says.

He describes the months since his arrest as "the wilderness period" and "the nightmare."

At Annie's kindergarten graduation, Blagojevich says, he thought about events he might miss if he's convicted and imprisoned. His wife has talked to Amy, their 13-year-old, about what might happen, he says.

In the book, Blagojevich recounts a conversation with his since-deceased mother, Mila, after he won a seat in the Illinois House of Representatives in 1992. She made him promise to always be honest.

Asked whether he believes he kept that promise, he says, "Very much so. Absolutely."

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