

Arrest cripples governor's ability to get job done, observers say

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SPRINGFIELD — Despite mounting legal troubles, Gov. Rod Blagojevich still has a number of state government matters on his plate.

But his ability to govern has been crippled because of his arrest Tuesday on federal corruption charges, several political observers say.

"He's governor, and he can sign bills and issue executive orders," said Kent Redfield, a retired political science professor at the University of Illinois at Springfield. "But anything he does is going to be looked at through the prism of his legal troubles.

"Nothing he does will be taken on its merits. It will all be: How does this fit into the governor's legal problems?"

Rep. Aaron Schock, R-Peoria, said, "I don't think anything he does will be fruitful at this point."

A Blagojevich spokesman didn't respond Wednesday to a question about how his arrest might affect day-to-day state government. But on Tuesday, his press office issued a statement saying the allegations against him would "do nothing to impact the services, duties or function of the state."

One of the items of governmental business still pending before Blagojevich is what to do about nine bills that lawmakers passed in November and await his signature or veto.

The bills cover a wide range of subjects. One would extend the life of a tax-increment financing district in Hoffman Estates. Another would require insurance companies to cover diagnosing and treating autism in children up to age 21. A third would require the state's most lucrative casinos, all near Chicago, to channel a portion of their profits to the horse racing industry.

Blagojevich also is pursuing the closure of a state prison in Pontiac and the transfer of the Illinois Department of Transportation's traffic safety division to southern Illinois, despite objections from a bipartisan panel of lawmakers.

Neither of those plans has been executed. The prison closure, previously planned for the end of this month, is on hold because of an ongoing legal battle.

Sen. Dan Rutherford, R-Chenoa, an opponent of the Pontiac prison closure, on Wednesday said that in light of the governor's arrest, the Illinois Department of Corrections director should display "true leadership" and suspend the plan to close the prison.

Corrections Director Roger Walker Jr. responded with a prepared statement saying that Illinois' financial challenges haven't changed and that the plan to close the prison is "better for the operations and efficiency of the agency."

State Treasurer Alexi Giannoulias said he hasn't observed any difference in state government's operations since the governor's arrest.

"From our office's perspective, not much has changed," he said. "We're still investing the state's money. Not much has changed at all."

Also on Wednesday, Deputy Gov. Bob Greenlee turned in his resignation, Blagojevich spokesman Lucio Guerrero said. Guerrero said Greenlee didn't give a reason for resigning.

Greenlee's departure comes a day after the arrests of Blagojevich and his chief of staff, John Harris, and the release of an affidavit spelling out federal prosecutors' corruption allegations against the pair.

The affidavit mentions "Deputy Governor A" several times, though never by name. But on at least five occasions, the affidavit refers to Deputy Governor A as "he" or "him." One section of the affidavit describes a Nov. 3 conversation between Blagojevich and Deputy Governor A, in which they talked about a Chicago Tribune editorial.

A Blagojevich spokesman wouldn't confirm whether Greenlee is Deputy Governor A. Greenlee told The Associated Press that he'd "been instructed" not to speak about his resignation.

Blagojevich has three deputy governors - two men and a woman. In addition to Greenlee, who became a deputy governor in June, the other deputy governors are Louanner Peters, who has held the post since December 2006, and Dean Martinez, who was promoted to the job Dec. 1.

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