



File photos show Tammy Duckworth, a disabled Iraq war veteran and currently the Illinois veteran affairs director, U.S. Reps. Jesse Jackson Jr., of Chicago and Jan Schakowsky, of Evanston, Ill., Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan and Illinois Senate President Emil Jones. The five have been mentioned as potential candidates to fill the Senate seat of President-elect Barack Obama. (AP Photo/Staff)



Ill. contenders for Senate seat walking fine line

By TAMMY WEBBER – 7 hours ago

CHICAGO (AP) — People interested in succeeding President-elect Barack Obama in the Senate find themselves in a delicate position: How do you campaign for a seat tainted by an allegedly corrupt governor?

You could go on offense, like Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr. did, choking up as he denied promising Gov. Rod Blagojevich anything in exchange for a Senate appointment — but not backing off his obvious interest in the seat.

You could prepare quietly. Rep. Jan Schakowsky, who had talked to Blagojevich before this week's arrest, said Thursday that she's still interested in the job and already has "called some people to see if we can have supporters in place and thinking what kind of team I would assemble."

But nobody is quite sure how to promote themselves for a seat now seemingly in limbo after Blagojevich's arrest on charges that he tried to sell the seat to line his pockets. And few are stating their intentions publicly, not until they know whether Lt. Gov. Patrick Quinn will appoint someone to the job or whether it will be filled by a special election.

"We're making this up as we go along," said Chris Mooney, a political science professor at the University of Illinois at Springfield. "You have to be careful but you have to make it known you're interested."

Federal lawmakers have made it clear that they would not accept an appointment from Blagojevich, who's been holed up in his office and saying nothing publicly. If he steps down quickly, Quinn could appoint Obama's replacement and the matter would be over.

If Blagojevich is impeached, the process could take months. The state also could hold a special election, but that would be costly and also take time.

Anyone who hopes to have a shot at the seat must quickly distance themselves from the federal corruption probe — like Jackson did — assuring the public that they promised no favors, said Dick Simpson, a University of Illinois-Chicago political science professor and former Chicago alderman.

Then they must begin preparing to campaign while lobbying Quinn.

"Like Jackson, you simply state 'I'm the best candidate because,' then you begin calling campaign contributors," Simpson said. "They're probably doing that cautiously."

Others mentioned as interested in the seat include Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan, state Veterans Affairs Director Tammy Duckworth, U.S. Reps. Danny David, Luis Gutierrez and Schakowsky, and former state Senate President Emil Jones, a close ally of Blagojevich. Most did not return calls Thursday.

Gutierrez said he's no longer interested in the job; Madigan said she's not thought about it yet because she's still dealing with the crisis.

In an election, candidates could be more forward, since they'd be expected to campaign. But seeking an appointment from Quinn is a more delicate matter.

Do you call directly? Have others talk you up? Generate favorable media attention?

Schakowsky said if the decision is Quinn's, she would call him to make her case, as she did with Blagojevich. She said she doesn't believe her discussions with Blagojevich would hurt her chances.

Part of the difficulty for potential appointees is that Quinn hasn't formed many close alliances in Springfield, so there are few favors to cash in, Mooney said.

"Quinn is a populist, good-government guy," Mooney said. "I think he would base it on whatever criteria he has, but it wouldn't be so much a lobbying situation."

Mooney doesn't believe Quinn would appoint any of the candidates Blagojevich was considering. Instead, he suggested Quinn might make a clean break by appointing someone outside the current political establishment like former Gov. Jim Edgar, a Republican with an unblemished reputation.

But there's always the chance of an election, which would require less backdoor diplomacy, but a whole lot of money.

Candidates would have to quickly raise \$10 million to \$20 million and then would have only two to three months to campaign. Raising that much money in such a short time would be hard without making promises to wealthy interests.

And that could put a cloud back over the whole process.

"I don't know what people need to do," Mooney said. "Anything you do has a 50/50 chance of being right or wrong."

Associated Press writers Don Babwin and Deanna Bellandi contributed to this story.