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U.S. Sen. Roland Burris

Burris' Senate Colleagues Turn Their Back on Him—Literally

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by [Anne Szustek](#)

Some five months after being appointed to the U.S. Senate by disgraced former Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich, the new senator is failing to win friends and influence people.

[Home](#) » [Beyond the Headlines](#) » [Politics](#)



In This Article

- [Burris Losing Senate Popularity Contest](#)
- [Background: Burris' reputation marred by Blagojevich connections](#)
- [Key Player: Roland Burris \(1937-\)](#)

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Burris Losing Senate Popularity Contest

Sen. Roland Burris, D-Ill., gets little more than a polite hello when in the presence of his Senate colleagues, writes The Associated Press. Generally, when new members arrive in the 100-member house of Congress, they are welcomed with hearty guffaws, hugs and mentorship by a longtime senator.

But Burris, appointed by former Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich—ousted from office in connection with an alleged conspiracy to sell the Senate seat vacated by President Barack Obama and now held by Burris—remains excluded from Senate collegiality, and many of his cohorts actually appear to be visibly ignoring him.

His fellow Illinois senator, Majority Whip Dick Durbin, asked him to step down. His Democratic colleagues appreciate his vote, but don't want to get too close. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., has let Burris preside over the Senate, a friendly step, even if it's a mostly ceremonial duty.

Rutgers political science professor Ross K. Baker, the author of "Friend and Foe in the U.S. Senate," told the AP that Burris' fellow members in the Senate may see him as "personally an inoffensive guy but he's a carrier of the pathogen of Blagojevich."

Burris does have his supporters back home in Illinois, but perhaps not enough of them to get him elected outright in 2010. Last weekend on C-SPAN, political analyst Charlie Cook called Burris' chances "extraordinarily slim," as quoted by The Swamp blog on the Chicago Tribune.



Do you think Burris will eventually be accepted by his colleagues in the Senate?

Yes No Maybe

Gidget The Conversation Starter

Background: Burris' reputation marred by Blagojevich connections

Burris barely made it into the Senate after he was appointed by now-former Gov. Rod Blagojevich on Dec. 30. The Illinois secretary of state, Jesse White, refused to sign off on the nomination, and the U.S. Senate initially rejected him.

Democrats pointed to a Constitutional stipulation that allows for each congressional chamber to choose its own membership. Sens. Durbin and Reid told Burris he would need to testify

Sources in this Story

- o [MSNBC \(AP\): Burris is an outcast in clubby Senate](#)
- o [The Washington Post: Howard Kurtz Critiques the Press and Analyzes the Media](#)
- o [Chicago Tribune The Swamp blog: Sen. Burris' "Extraordinarily slim" chances](#)
- o [findingDulcinea: Affidavit](#)

in front of a panel of Illinois State House members who were deciding whether the governor should be impeached. Burriss maintained his innocence during his testimony, but White still did not confirm the nomination. Referring to a rule dating back to 1884, Durbin and Reid argued that [Burriss could not be seated without White's signature](#).

[Puts Burriss' Senate Appointment Back Under Fire](#)

- o [The New York Times: Burriss Says Audiotape Confirms Innocence](#)

Burriss' credentials were eventually approved by Senate officials in mid-January and he was sworn in. Burriss' woes have continued since arriving in Washington, however.

Burriss issued an affidavit in mid-February that outlined his dealings with Robert Blagojevich, the brother of the disgraced politician, as well as the former governor's aides. It included the information that, before Burriss was appointed to the Senate, Robert Blagojevich asked him for fundraising help to get his brother re-elected. This information was not mentioned during Burriss' testimony in front of the State House committee, sparking a new wave of calls for further investigation into Burriss' possible connections to the Blagojevich scandal.

On May 26, a transcript of a November discussion between Burriss and Robert Blagojevich was released by a federal court; the actual [tape of the conversation](#) was released a day later. It quickly filtered through the Chicago news media; Burriss stated that the tape showed his innocence, while others had quite the opposite perception.

"What I heard was a wink and a nod," University of Illinois at Springfield political scientist Kent Redfield told The New York Times. "Burriss really wanted the appointment, and he was more than happy to raise money for Blagojevich if that's what it took."

Burriss maintains that he did not give any money to Blagojevich's camp because, as he said during an interview with Chicago station WGN, "it would not be ethical or right for me to do that."

Key Player: Roland Burriss (1937-)

By and large Burriss' decades in Illinois political service have been free of controversy. He has served in a variety of positions, including state attorney general and vice-chairman of the Democratic National Committee. He has also made unsuccessful bids for Chicago mayor, U.S. Senate and, on three occasions, a place on the Democratic ticket as candidate for Illinois governor.

The last of those campaigns was in 2002, when he had the primary election endorsement of then-state Sen. Barack Obama. Blagojevich would go on to secure the Democratic party nomination and then the governorship of Illinois.

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