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Bashing by Blagojevich a badge of honor for many

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CHICAGO — President Barack Obama is hen-pecked. U.S. Senate majority leader Harry Reid is a horse's behind. And U.S. Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr. is just, well, "really bad."

Or so says Rod Blagojevich.

In wiretap recordings played by prosecutors at his corruption trial, the foul-mouthed former governor bashes politicians, reporters, the Illinois voters he worked for and even his own wife, Patti.

Whether the verbal attacks the FBI caught on tape in the weeks before Blagojevich's arrest in 2008 leave a lasting impression on the public — let alone on jurors — remains to be seen. Many of his targets, including Obama, are sure to embrace his invective as proof they never cozied up to the now-radioactive Democrat.

"Consider the source," says Andy Shaw, who heads a government watchdog group. "It's a badge of distinction to be dissed by this man."

The main victim of all the insults that have filled the courtroom may be Blagojevich himself.

His attorneys, who are expected to begin presenting their defense Monday, will be trying to refute evidence that Blagojevich schemed to sell or trade the U.S. Senate seat vacated by Obama. Blagojevich, 53, has pleaded not guilty to all charges. His defense will try to counter the impression the recordings left by playing new ones they believe will show him in a better light.

Still, might the derision Blagojevich levels at people sully their reputations? In short: probably not.

Anger, jealousy

For starters, he offers few details. And the quick-tempered governor often appeared motivated by anger and jealousy.

Blagojevich held a grudge against Jackson, the son of civil rights leader Jesse Jackson, because he allegedly reneged on a pledge to endorse Blagojevich in his first gubernatorial primary. John Harris, a former Blagojevich chief of staff, testified.

Says Blagojevich about Jackson on one tape, "He's really bad."

His dislike of Obama stems partly from jealousy. When Blagojevich was first governor, Obama was a little-known Illinois state legislator. In his second term, Obama became president — a job Blagojevich aspired to. In a post-election funk, he calls Obama an "(expletive) demigod."

In later conversations, he lashes out at the then-president elect and his advisers for spurning alleged offers for Blagojevich to name Obama friend Valerie Jarrett to the Senate seat in exchange for a Cabinet post or other top job.

"They're not willing to give me anything but appreciation," Blagojevich snarls on tape. "(Expletive) them!"

Some observers had wondered if recordings might reveal Obama was more open to cutting a deal than he's let on. The recordings seem to indicate he wasn't.

Blagojevich does touch a sore spot for Obama: convicted influence peddler Tony Rezko, once a fundraiser for both men. The then-governor complains his links to Rezko put him in the cross-hairs of investigators, while there was little political fallout for Obama.

"I believe I'm more pristine on Rezko than him," Blagojevich says on tape, without offering details.

In another swipe, Blagojevich says Obama might be willing to heed his wife's advice. Why? Obama, he says, "is more hen-pecked than me."

Blasts Durbin, others

Blagojevich also blasts U.S. Senator Dick Durbin and Obama Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel. He calls Reid an "(expletive) horse's (rear end)." And when a top aide suggests Cheryle Jackson, his former spokeswoman, as a possible replacement senator, Blagojevich seethes.

"She's so (expletive) incompetent and a (expletive) liar," he says, adding she once bounced a check written to Blagojevich's campaign fund.

Cheryle Jackson did not immediately respond to several messages seeking comment.

Jesse Jackson Jr. isn't likely to lose sleep over Blagojevich's unkind words. But a potentially far more serious revelation about the 14-year congressman came out at trial.

Prosecutors told the presiding judge that a witness, if asked, would place Jackson at a meeting where a businessman offered to raise \$1 million for Blagojevich if the governor appointed Jackson to the Senate.

Jackson hasn't been accused of wrongdoing and said in a recent statement he was "never part of any improper scheme with Blagojevich or anyone else." A spokeswoman for Jackson, Theresa Caldwell, said Thursday that he wouldn't comment further.

Still, it could lead some in the Democratic Party to consider Jackson damaged goods, said Kent Redfield, a professor emeritus of politics at the University of Illinois Springfield.

"I'm not sure Jesse Jackson's biggest problem is Rod Blagojevich offering a moral judgment on his character," Redfield said.

Ungrateful voters

It may not help Blagojevich with jurors that one target of his ire was no less than the people of Illinois.

Blagojevich is heard fuming about their perceived ingratitude, pointing to his successful push for legislation that let seniors ride public transportation for free.

"(I gave) your grandmother a free (expletive) ride on a bus. And what do I get for that? Only 13 percent of you all out there think I'm doing a good job." He adds, "So (expletive) all of you!"

The former governor has offered at least one apology.

He was heard complaining in one recording about Chicago Sun-Times political columnist Carol Marin. "I hate her, I hate her," he says.

Marin was in the courtroom when the tape was played. Blagojevich approached her outside court to say he was sorry, she recounted in a column. She accepted, but told him an apology wasn't necessary.

"It's pretty good for your career though, right?" he said.

While Blagojevich rarely displays introspection on tapes, he does once take himself to task for his profanity. After cursing at his wife Patti on the phone, he suddenly turns quiet.

"I gotta stop swearin,'" he says, almost whispering.

"It's terrible," she agrees. "Total gutter mouth."

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