

September 23, 2008 Tuesday

Final Edition

**Gov: 'I Didn't Pay Attention'; Can't explain why he kept $65,000 donation from felon, but says he'll 'sort it out'**

By Chris Fusco and Dave McKinney

Staff reporters

As Gov. Blagojevich called lawmakers to Springfield on Monday to talk ethics, he couldn't explain how his campaign fund has been holding onto $65,000 given by a former state employee who pleaded guilty to felony charges in April.

"I learned about that today," Blagojevich said, referring to a Chicago Sun-Times story about contributions from Ali D. Ata, former chief of the Illinois Finance Authority. Pressed by reporters at a morning news conference in Chicago, Blagojevich replied, "I didn't pay attention. . . . We're going to work through the process and sort it out."

Ata cut a plea deal with federal prosecutors during the trial of former Blagojevich fund-raiser Tony Rezko and provided testimony that helped lead to Rezko's corruption conviction in June. Ata told jurors he gave $25,000 to the governor's campaign with the understanding that he would be appointed to a high-paying state post. After taking office in January 2003, Blagojevich appointed Ata to the $127,000-a-year Finance Authority job.

Blagojevich did not say if he would donate the Ata money to charity, as he did $85,000 worth of contributions from Rezko and Rezko companies. But the governor indicated he might draft legislation to address what should happen when people give politicians money and then are convicted of crimes.

"When things like that happen, then everybody should be required to refund some of the campaign money to places that can actually help people," he said. "I think we should consider a law that requires that for everybody."

Blagojevich then jabbed at his political nemesis, House Speaker Michael Madigan (D-Chicago).

"Tony Rezko has contributed money to a lot of people, including Speaker Madigan, who has not returned the money," the governor said. "I'm certainly interested in doing what's right along those lines, and that's an example of something that might be right."

In Springfield, Madigan ridiculed Blagojevich.

"I would think what motivates him not to give the money back is that he probably needs the money to pay his criminal defense costs. That's what drives him," Madigan said. "His method for quite a while has been to attempt to tie me into anything he can think of. And most of it is up in the outer reaches of his mind."

September 25, 2008 Thursday

Final Edition