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**Panel may call ex-deputy gov to testify**

By Dave McKinney]

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SPRINGFIELD-Gov. Blagojevich's onetime top aide, who now is New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg's chief political strategist, was named Friday as a potential witness by the House panel weighing impeachment against the governor.

Former Deputy Gov. Bradley Tusk was among 15 current or former administration officials identified as possible witnesses by the impeachment committee, though it is not certain whether he will be subpoenaed to testify against his former boss.

Before leaving the state payroll in December 2006, Tusk had his fingerprints on some of the governor's most ambitious yet star-crossed programs and was described by the governor as a "superstar" within his administration.

Tusk oversaw a plan to seek corporate sponsorships for state assets, which was purported to be capable of raising hundreds of millions of dollars for the state but never did. He also helped engineer the 2004 attempt to import $2.6 million worth of flu shots that had to be thrown away.

Both initiatives were cited by the impeachment committee last week as examples of "abuses of power" by Blagojevich when either state funds were lavished on favored contractors or state purchasing rules were broken.

Tusk's name also surfaced in Tony Rezko's corruption trial earlier this year, though Tusk has not been accused of any criminal wrongdoing.

In testimony at the trial, Tusk was placed aboard a 2003 fund-raising flight paid for by corrupt Blagojevich appointee Stuart Levine. On that flight, the governor allegedly mused openly about his presidential ambitions and told now-convicted fund-raiser Joseph Cari "that it was easier for governors to solicit campaign contributions because governors had the ability to 'award contracts' and give legal work, consulting work, and investment banking work to campaign contributors," according to the criminal complaint that federal prosecutors lodged against Blagojevich last week.

Tusk, who is campaign manager of Bloomberg's re-election bid, did not return a phone call seeking comment.

Bloomberg's office declined comment beyond providing a transcript of a Dec. 9 exchange between the mayor and a New York Times reporter about Tusk's ties to Illinois' allegedly corrupt governor.

"Bradley is an honest, hardworking, competent guy, never had anything to do with any of [those] parts of that administration and, you know, has been out of there for a long time," Bloomberg said.

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