

December 9, 2008 Tuesday

Final Edition

**Quinn to gov: Quit now; GOP leader calls for immediate impeachment**

By Dave McKinney

Springfield bureau chief

SPRINGFIELD-Lt. Gov. Patrick Quinn called on Gov. Blagojevich today to "do the right thing and step aside."

The No. 2 state official added, "I hope he does the appropriate thing for Illinois."

If Blagojevich left office, Quinn would become governor.

Meanwhile, the top House Republican today called for Blagojevich's resignation and called on House Democrats to launch impeachment proceedings "immediately" against the now-charged state chief executive.

"Today our state is facing a crisis. Illinois citizens are victims of a corrupt governor," said House Minority Leader Tom Cross (R-Oswego). "To restore confidence and trust in Illinois state government, I have asked Gov. Blagojevich to resign from office immediately.

"Furthermore, I have informed him that I have requested impeachment hearings to begin immediately in the Illinois House of Representatives," Cross continued. "We have too much work to do to move Illinois forward, we cannot allow this crisis to impact Illinois citizens any longer."

A spokesman for House Speaker Michael Madigan (D-Chicago), who would have to sign off on beginning an impeachment probe and has already done extensive research on the topic, declined comment when asked about the matter today.

Under the state Constitution, the 118-member House must first vote by a simple majority -- 60 votes -- in order to impeach a state officeholder. The 59-member Senate then must vote by a two-thirds majority -- 40 votes -- in order to convict.

Rep. John Fritchey (D-Chicago), one of several House Democrats who have been pushing impeachment in recent months, said today's stunning developments regarding Blagojevich necessitate action by the Legislature.

"There is no doubt these allegations create a sense of immediacy for the House to take a look at beginning impeachment proceedings," Fritchey said. "Whether it is pending legislation, the United States Senate vacancy or our troubled economy, our state has many needs that cannot wait for the judicial system to play itself out. I believe we need to act sooner rather than later."

In this morning's press conference announcing the charges against Blagojevich, U.S. Attorney Patrick Fitzgerald declined to say whether he would encourage action by the Legislature against the governor.

Asked about the possibility of removing Blagojevich from office, Fitzgerald said, "The U.S. attorney's office and the FBI do not have opinion [on] what actions the Legislature ought take."

Comptroller Dan Hynes said in a prepared statement, "For the well-being of Illinois, Gov. Blagojevich must resign immediately.

"While this investigation is still ongoing, our state cannot afford to remain engulfed in this unfolding scandal. Our government's ability to deal on a daily basis with the fiscal and economic crises we currently face demands leadership and integrity.

"On a personal note, I am immensely saddened and angered by these developments. This is perhaps the most embarrassing moment in the history of Illinois government and a stain that will not be easily removed," Hynes said.

A top Republican contender for the 2010 gubernatorial campaign, Sen. Bill Brady (R-Bloomington), also called for Blagojevich's resignation.

"The dire fiscal situation in Illinois demands that we have a chief executive who can devote his full attention to serving the people of Illinois. With this cloud now over his head, Rod Blagojevich clearly is encumbered in the performance of his official duties and should resign immediately," Brady said.

"Whether he is ultimately proven innocent or guilty, we know from recent history the time these judicial proceedings can take. Elected officials need to put the public interest ahead of their own personal interests. The interests of the people of Illinois should not be neglected while the governor faces a grave personal and legal challenge," Brady said.