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Final Edition

**'Surreal Day'; House impeaches gov again, 117-1**

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Staff reporters

SPRINGFIELD-There was no red-carpet treatment for Gov. Blagojevich Wednesday. Not even close.

He didn't get booed as he might have at a professional sporting event, but Blagojevich got no applause nor formal introduction while fulfilling his constitutional duty and gaveling in the state Senate to mark the opening of the 96th General Assembly.

As Blagojevich awkwardly presided over the Senate, the newly seated Illinois House reaffirmed last week's impeachment vote by a 117-1 margin, with the only "no" vote coming from the governor's sister-in-law, Rep. Deborah Mell (D-Chicago).

"It's a historic and kind of surreal day in the state of Illinois," said Sen. Martin Sandoval (D-Cicero).

Face-to-face with the 59 senators who could kick him out of office in three weeks, Blagojevich at times appeared fidgety, impassive and highly scripted during his 65-minute, ceremonial Senate appearance.

"These are challenging times, hard economic times facing the people of Illinois. I hope we can find a way -- as we do with other issues -- to find the truth and sort things out, put the business of the people first," Blagojevich said.

During a series of floor speeches that led up to the coronation of new Senate President John Cullerton (D-Chicago), several senators solemnly alluded to Blagojevich's upcoming impeachment trial.

The only moment when the governor appeared to speak extemporaneously came when Sen. Louis Viverito (D-Burbank) had to be sworn in late after being stuck in an elevator as a battery of national media watched.

"Congratulations. The whole country knows you now," Blagojevich told Viverito, prompting a muted chuckle from some senators and grimaces from others.

Before concluding, the governor seemed to subtly focus on his impeachment trial, set to get under way Jan. 26, by quoting Lincoln and imploring senators to act "with malice toward none, with charity for all."

Later, the Senate's sergeant-at-arms and his deputy, along with a Senate Democratic lawyer, walked to the governor's office and presented Blagojevich's deputy counsel with a summons, compelling the governor to respond to charges that he has abused his power.

In the House, another vote was taken to reaffirm last week's impeachment. Mell, making her House debut, explained her opposition to impeachment in a statement.

"The charges in the impeachment were difficult to reconcile with the man and brother-in-law I know," she said. "I could not in good conscience vote for his impeachment."