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Final Edition

**Tapes 'sickening, nauseating'; Top Dem senator predicts 59-0 vote against gov after hearing secret recordings**

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Staff reporters

SPRINGFIELD-Gov. Blagojevich is a no-show at his impeachment trial, but his voice echoed throughout the ornate Illinois Senate Tuesday as undercover FBI recordings of the governor's alleged shakedown of a campaign donor were played for the first time.

In one of the most dramatic moments of Blagojevich's trial, the recordings showed his 59 senator-jurors how the governor allegedly schemed to extort a racetrack operator for $100,000 in exchange for signing legislation that would pump millions of dollars into the racing industry.

During a portion of the five minutes of taped conversations, Blagojevich's ex-chief of staff Lon Monk, now a lobbyist, said he got in the "face" of the donor -- racing mogul John Johnston -- about the donation, drawing praise from the governor.

"OK. Good," Blagojevich said, prompting some senators to shake their heads in disbelief. Prosecutors say the governor went on a fund-raising frenzy to beat a Jan. 1 deadline when most big donations from state contractors would be barred under a new ethics law.

The governor's voice silenced the jammed legislative chamber as senators, some leaning in closer, cupped their ears to hear the governor's sometimes-muffled words more clearly.

"It sounds like a couple of organized crime figures out preparing to break some kneecaps. It's just horrible. It's nauseating. It's sickening," said Sen. Dan Cronin (R-Elmhurst).

The recordings were just a snippet of "thousands" of conversations that prosecutors say they secretly recorded. But they marked a key moment in the impeachment trial, where a vote could come as early as Thursday.

Preparing for Blagojevich's possible ouster, Lt. Gov. Pat Quinn plans to be in Springfield Thursday and would immediately take the oath of office if senators vote to remove the governor, Quinn spokesman Bob Reed said.

In one surprise Tuesday, Blagojevich is heard on one recording making a reference to his former fund-raising chief, Chris Kelly, suggesting some level of mistrust had permeated their relationship.

"I feel like there's somebody else who's holding him [Johnston] back" -- an apparent reference to Johnston not yet giving the money to the governor's campaign fund.

Monk replied, "No."

"I believe it's Chris," Blagojevich said, referring to Kelly, according to a source with knowledge of the exchange. Kelly and Johnston are longtime friends, and the governor has maintained that he's still close to Kelly, who had been indicted on federal tax charges a year before the secretly recorded conversation.

"Well what took, you know, a whole year?" Blagojevich continued, possibly referring to the time they had been waiting for a contribution from Johnston.

"I don't think he's been talking to Chris," Monk said.

The tapes rolled as FBI Special Agent Daniel Cain told senators the voice on the recordings was positively Blagojevich and that agents listened repeatedly to the tapes before quoting excerpts in the criminal complaint. Over and over, Cain told lawmakers he couldn't go beyond the charges, but when asked if an indictment would follow the criminal complaint against the governor, he said: "The answer is yes."

The recordings were so convincing to one leading Democrat, who was an architect of the House impeachment effort, that he predicted a 59-0 vote against the governor in the Senate.

"I don't think there is any defense to this whatsoever," said Rep. Jack Franks (D-Woodstock). "I don't see how anybody gets past this."

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