
Rep. Fritchey eyes impeachment proceedings

By Greg Hinz
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(Crain's) — A leading member of the Illinois General Assembly says he'll begin immediate impeachment proceedings against Rod Blagojevich if the governor doesn't quit first.

In a phone interview, North Side Democratic state Rep. John Fritchey said, "I don't know we have a choice" but to act, given that Mr. Blagojevich has given no sign he'll voluntarily vacate his office and given the "urgency" of several matters, including the appointment someone to fill the U.S. Senate seat of President-elect Barack Obama.

"I've always said impeachment only is to be used in extreme circumstances. I think this fits that test," said Mr. Fritchey, noting that Mr. Blagojevich Tuesday was charged with trying to get members of the Tribune editorial board fired, to extort campaign donations from Children's Memorial Hospital and of attempting to get Mr. Obama to give him a Cabinet spot or other job in exchange for selecting an Obama associate for the Senate.

"Based on the recordings we've heard, it's obvious he's abdicated any trust," Mr. Fitchey said.

Mr. Fritchey said he already has phoned House Speaker Michael Madigan about moving an impeachment bill.

Under legislative rules and the Illinois Constitution, the House can convene in a committee of the whole and move to a fairly fast vote, or first hold a separate committee hearing, Mr. Fritchey said. If a majority of the House votes to impeach, the matter then moves to the Senate, which could remove the governor if a supermajority of at least 37 of the 59 senators so vote.

Only one other state official has been removed by the process in the history of Illinois, Mr. Fritchey said, a judge in 1832.
