



Bernard Schoenburg: Governor's 'activist' style riles just about everybody

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It will be a long time, I predict, before there is another administration like that of Gov. **ROD BLAGOJEVICH**. And Democrats as well as Republicans will see that as good news, as he has managed to garner as much or more anger from his own party.

That's sure the way it sounded in the hour-long debate in the House last week when, backed into a corner by a surprise Blagojevich move, lawmakers approved his amendatory veto that took a bill to bail out Chicago-area transit agencies and added a provision that transit districts across the state must provide free rides to senior citizens.

Blagojevich, by his own account, kept that surprise secret until after the legislature a week earlier sent him its mass transit solution — one he had bad-mouthed for months and threatened to veto outright because it included a sales tax increase for the Chicago region.

But the governor took the bill that breaks his no-tax promise and created his own sweetener — the free-ride provision that forced the legislature to return to Springfield to approve the change or risk 2,400 layoffs and many route eliminations or reductions in the Chicago area by this weekend.

Just to keep up with his finger-pointing style, the governor told a group of senior citizens in one of his press events he had in Chicago in the days leading up to Thursday's session, "The General Assembly sent me a pile of horse manure to solve the CTA, and I see a pony in that by giving every senior citizen free rides on buses and subway trains."

Rep. **DAVID MILLER**, D-Lynwood, was not amused. In the House debate that ultimately saw the amendatory veto approved 61-47, Miller said the governor's words were an insult to Democrats and Republicans alike who worked for years on transit system reforms and the funding idea.

But Miller was only one of several Democrats who took off on their own governor. And I think history will show that this kind of intraparty angst doesn't happen often.

"This is not about turning horse manure into ponies," railed Rep. **JOHN FRITCHEY**, D-Chicago, whose district includes the governor's home. "It's not about making lemons into lemonade. It's about playing politics with people's lives, and it's shameful. The process is broken here."

Fritchey said Blagojevich had misused the governor's amendatory veto power — legislation altering that Fritchey thinks should be eliminated in Illinois.

"It's a continuation of his attempts to unilaterally expand his policies in defiance of common sense, in defiance of the process, in defiance of the Illinois Constitution,"

Fritchey added. "We do not have a dictator, we have a governor. At some point, he's going to understand that."

Rep. **LOU LANG**, D-Skokie, said Blagojevich was clearly trying to "pander to a group of voters for his own purposes.

"This was clumsy," Lang yelled. "This was transparent. This was done (for) his own political profit and at our expense, and at the expense of 12 million people that live in our state. ..."

Lang lambasted the governor for not working with the General Assembly on a solution, instead springing a last-minute change that extended for a week anxiety that Chicago-area mass transit could be severely cut.

"But this mirrors what you've done on other issues, governor," Lang said. "On cable TV reform, you were not there. On electric rates, you were not there. On property tax relief, you were not there. On the budget, you took a document that we created and ripped it up for your own benefit."

Lang said he would continue to speak out, and urged others to do so.

Republicans, as well, joined in. And House GOP Leader **TOM CROSS** of Oswego didn't let the outcry from House Democrats go unnoticed.

Cross said he found it "a little fascinating" that so many Democrats wanted to pick on their own governor. He said it's easy to do, given Blagojevich's low approval ratings.

"What's fascinating about it is (that) it is your party and your leadership since 2003 that have enabled him to do all the things you're complaining of," Cross said, in part through backing his election.

"You've enabled this governor to spend recklessly," Cross added. "You've been part of the problem."

For his part, after the amendatory veto also got a 32-19 nod in the Senate, the governor told reporters he thinks some lawmakers are mad at him because he cut their "pork" projects. He said there should be a natural tension between the executive and legislative branches.

Blagojevich takes an "activist approach," he said, so if lawmakers don't do what he wants, "We're always interested in finding ways, always within the law, always within the constitution, that are creative, but that gives me the ability to, at the end of the day, get real things done for real people. And I know that ruffles feathers. ... But I think that some of them need to get a grip. ... I think they ought to get a little less angry at me and start realizing what their mission is, and their mission is to help people. ... I would be a governor that I wouldn't like if I simply sat there afraid of the criticism. ... I helped the senior citizens get free public transportation. I know it's the right thing to do."

For all the governor's talk, it should be noted that a chief goal of his and most legislators – enactment of a capital program for road and school construction – is still one of last year's unsolved problems.

"It's going to be a really tough budget year," said Rep. **ROSEMARY MULLIGAN**, R-Des Plaines, in the debate. "I hope that all the people that are upset about this now will remember" and not just give in to expensive Blagojevich initiatives "without a big strong

fight against having us pushed around on a budget that's going to collapse and implode.”

Mulligan knows something about the shenanigans of Blagojevich — on much more expensive items than free rides for seniors. She is her party's top person on the human services appropriations committee, meaning the governor's push to expand health care to ever-more people even as the state has a backlog of bills is something on which she keeps a close eye.

She also said, in debate Thursday and later, that she believes the governor's office has purposely shut off information to lawmakers about such issues.

“For a while, they wouldn't talk to the House Democrats, but they'd talk to us,” Mulligan told me. “Now, they're not even talking to us.”

“The fact of the matter is,” she said in debate, “when we have agencies that are told not to speak to our staff or to us, and the public wonders what's happening here in Springfield, it's because we have a governor who has decided that how we spend money is up to him and not for the rest of us to decide.”

Some how, the bipartisan feeling I get is that this is no way to run a government.

Helping Sen. Clinton

A couple of former employees of U.S. Sen. **DICK DURBIN**, D-Ill., are the first paid staffers for the Illinois presidential campaign of U.S. Sen. **HILLARY CLINTON**, D-N.Y.

VALERIE ALEXANDER, who was Chicago office director for Durbin and is now taking a leave as a senior vice president of Edelman Public Relations; and **STACEY ZOLT-HARA**, Durbin's former Chicago press secretary now taking a leave as a vice president of the Res Publica PR firm, have become paid spokeswomen for Clinton's campaign.

Durbin is a strong supporter of U.S. Sen. **BARACK OBAMA**, D-Ill., for president.

“Certainly he is my political mentor and somebody that I admire immensely,” Alexander said of Durbin. “I tease him that he will one day see the error of his ways.”

Alexander is married to **MIKE ALEXANDER**, now of Chicago but once an employee of Durbin's Springfield office. An in-house lobbyist for the East Alton-based SimmonsCooper law firm, which has an office in Chicago, Mike Alexander is “a staunch Barack supporter,” his wife said.

“Makes for a very interesting marriage,” she added.

Valerie Alexander said Clinton will be seeking Democratic National Convention delegates in Illinois in the Feb. 5 Democratic primary. Illinois is not winner-take-all for delegates, so even if Obama wins Illinois and many delegates, other candidates can win delegates as well, congressional district by congressional district.

“I think Hillary is going to be competitive all over the state, quite honesty,” Valerie Alexander said.

Look-alikes

JIM DONELAN, executive assistant to Springfield Mayor **TIM DAVLIN**, considered running for office this year, but didn't. However, that's not stopping people from thinking that he

is — even though it's because they think he's somebody else.

Donelan says it's an everyday occurrence that somebody mistakes him for **JOHN MORRIS**, a Republican candidate for the U.S. House from the 18th Congressional District.

Hey, they could be brothers, even if they are in different political parties.

Morris is running against state Rep. **AARON SCHOCK** and **JIM McCONOUGHEY** for the GOP nomination for the seat now held by U.S. Rep. **RAY LaHOOD**, R-Peoria, who isn't seeking re-election.

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