G-Rod will continue to haunt Illinois

Lawyers for Rod Blagojevich told reporters last that there might be a delay in the former governor’s criminal trial when a federal grand jury, as expected, hands down a new indictment. But they also stressed that they were working hard to keep the trial on track for its June start date.

As I write this, the US Attorney’s office in Chicago is hoping to re-indict Blagojevich in order to make sure its criminal case isn’t damaged by an upcoming US Supreme Court ruling on the federal “Honest Services” statute. The brief that it has been used by federal prosecutors for years to prosecute politicians and corporate executives on a wide variety of charges, claiming they defrauded investors, creditors, etc. via a “scheme or artifice to deprive another of the intangible right of honest services,”

The law has come under fire because it is so incredibly vague that prosecutors have used it to prosecute all sorts of behavior. US Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer wondered out loud over a worker taking an unauthorized break “to read the Racing Form,” could be indicted. Thankfully, federal prosecutors have better things to do than indict employees for reading newspapers. Still, the law is so vague and broad that Chief Justice John Roberts more than hinted that the statute was impossible to understand, which would therefore make it unconstitutional. Former Gov. George Ryan, Dock, and former governor Mr. Jeff Kinzler, former Chicago Sun-Times editor Conrad Black and many others, including Rod Blagojevich were all indicted on honest services fraud counts.

At least some court-imposed restrictions on the law are expected, so prosecutors are scrambling to make sure their cases are solid, including in Chicago.

But this column isn’t about honest services fraud. It’s about Illinois politics. So, let’s move on with it.

Blagojevich’s criminal trial has been expected to last most of the summer and end just about the time that the fall campaigns are heating up around Labor Day.

To date, Blagojevich has used every opportunity that he could to claim he was railroaded by the mainstream media and to point fingers of blame at his fellow Democrats who he believes are far more deserving of prosecution than him.

Blagojevich deepely and thoroughly despises Illinois House Speaker Michael Madigan and Senate President John Cullerton, so many believe he’ll use his trial and the accompanying daily media spotlight to try to hurt them and, by extension, their candidates as much as he can. Blagojevich has been vociferous with hostility towards the two men.

The former governor also detests Pat Quinn, whom he accuses of cutting a deal with Madigan and Cullerton on tax hikes in order to become governor. Well, yeah, it’s a silly theory, but this is Rod Blagojevich we’re talking about here. As I write this, we don’t know whether Quinn will survive the primary Democratic primary. But Blagojevich has suffered from working with [Speaker of the House] Embry Hynes, so I’m sure he’ll think of something to thwack Hynes with as well.

A brief delay while Blagojevich’s defense lawyers retool their case would probably hurt the Democrats even more than a June start because the trial could be pushed back into the fall campaign season itself. What the Democrats really need in order to avoid this embarrassment is a much longer delay, but that doesn’t seem to be in the cards as yet.

The only saving grace might be if Republican George Ryan makes it into the headlines with a post-election appeal to have his conviction overturned. But even that probably wouldn’t be much help. Ryan left office a long time ago. And since the nation’s focus is on anti-incumbent (for good reason), and the Democrats dominate just about everything in Illinois, it’ll likely just add fuel to that particular fire.

In other words, if you’re a Democrat there’s trouble on the way for you whether you like it or not, or whether you deserve it or not. Then again, if you’re a Democrat, then there’s a good chance you voted for Blagojevich twice – or four times counting anti-incumbent (for good reason), and the Democrats dominate just about everything in Illinois, it’ll likely just add fuel to that particular fire.

Believe or not there are people that still are not sure that “global warming” and “climate change” (GW and CC from here on) is real. In fact, many people think that articles are likely among this group, either maintaining a “healthy” skepticism about the threat or otherwise flippantly reacting to it. As someone who has researched and kept close tabs on this topic since the early 90’s, I feel that it might be worthwhile to suggest the evidence against you on this prominent issue. Understanding these reasons may help bridge the gap and generate more public demand for action.

I suspect that the most important reason people don’t accept GW or CC as a scientific certainty is because of its implications. If the Earth is going to warm as projected by the vast majority of climate scientists then the implications are going to change the way that we live and do business, and current actions (or lack thereof) may not be enough to avert climate change. Further, the failure of past attempts to curb GW and CC should change our approach to fighting these problems. One of the reasons why past attempts to curb GW and CC have failed is because of a lack of real political will. It is clear that the current climate change bill in the Senate is not going to pass, and it is likely that the House will not pass a similar bill. This lack of political will is a significant barrier to effective climate change policy.

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