

Fed tape indicates Obama seat wanted by Jesse Jackson, Jr.; Emil Jones throws in his hat



CHICAGO-- The second day of Rod Blagojevich's corruption trial brought further testimony from Alonzo Monk, the former governor's chief of staff, as well as a tape recording indicating that U.S. Representative Jesse Jackson, Jr. may have wanted Barack Obama's Senate seat.

Jurors heard a tape Thursday in which Monk said that Michael Runman, an associate of fundraiser Antoin "Tony" Rezko, was contacting him about Jackson. In another call, Monk can be heard mentioning Jackson. "He'll offer you fundraising and all kinds of stuff," Blagojevich said of Jackson on the call.

Monk said he understood Blagojevich to be saying that Jackson would attempt to bargain. Prosecutors have alleged associates of Jackson offered \$1.5 million in campaign funds.

Monk said a deal would have given Emil Jones Obama's seat. If the state senate did not override Blagojevich's veto of a bill that would

limit the governor's fund raising, Blagojevich would name Jones to the U.S. Senate. "Emil Jones agreed not to call a vote if Rod named him to Obama's seat," Monk said.

The agreement fell through when Obama called Jones personally and asked him to call the bill to a vote, so it wouldn't negatively impact his campaign in 2008, Monk said he learned. The House voted to override Blagojevich's veto of the bill 110 to 3, and the Senate eventually voted 55 to 0 to do the same.

The ethics legislation took effect on Jan. 1, 2009. It was that legislation that prosecutors contend forced Blagojevich to increase his extortionate fundraising tactics in the fall of 2008 before it took effect.

Monk ended his testimony for the week by talking about one of the alleged shakedowns in the case--an attempt to get a contribution from the head of a road builder's organization. Monk said that Blagojevich tied a plan to announce \$5 billion in tollway funds to obtaining a campaign donation from the organization's head, Jerry Krozel.

"We need to get \$500,000 from him," Monk recalled Blagojevich saying.

Monk, who was Blagojevich's law school roommate and was by his side through most of his political career, said Wednesday that Rezko and Christopher Kelly discussed various schemes with him and Blagojevich on how to raise \$100,000 each. The four planned to divide the money equally among themselves, he said.

Blagojevich has pleaded not guilty to scheming to profit from his power to fill the U.S. Senate seat vacated by Obama and squeeze people for campaign contributions. If convicted, he could receive up to 415 years in prison and fines totaling \$6 million.

Midwest hit by severe thunderstorms and tornadoes, 7 lives lost



MILLBURY, Ohio-- A northwest Ohio community is cleaning up the wreckage and mourning its dead after a severe tornado ripped a 10-mile-long, 300-yard wide trail of destruction through the area. It was part of a line of storms that did damage in at least three states and killed seven people in Ohio last weekend.

The National Weather Service said it confirmed four tornadoes, including one with winds up to 165 miles an hour.

Among the deaths were a 4-year-old child and man in Millbury. Lake Township, about five miles from Millbury, was also hit hard. Two adults died in a van there and the father of the Lake

High School valedictorian was also killed when he went upstairs at his home to find a flashlight. The graduation was held at the high school earlier this week, although the tornado had ripped the back wall of the school's gymnasium.

Lake Township police reported 50 homes destroyed and another 50 badly damaged, as well as six commercial buildings. Both communities are located in Wood County where two other deaths were confirmed.

A tornado touched down in Elmwood, Illinois Saturday night, causing damage as it sped through its downtown district.

Streets were covered with debris, branches and broken glass.

Several other communities were hard-hit by the severe weather. Streator, IL. Mayor Jimmie Lansford said his town "looked like a war zone." Seventeen people were transferred to hospitals and later released, he said.

In Michigan, 11 people were injured when a storm struck Sunday morning in Monroe County and damaged the exterior wall of the Fermi 2 Nuclear Power plant, temporarily prompting an automatic shutdown. Ten people were taken to hospitals by ambulances and another by helicopter.

Iran 'unbowed' by U.N. sanctions



NEW YORK--New economic sanctions were passed Wednesday against Iran by the United Nations Security Council. It was the fourth round of sanctions imposed by the U.N. in as many years over a nuclear program the West suspects is aimed at developing atomic weapons.

Iran leaders said Wednesday that they were unbowed by the U.N.'s action and would push forward with their country's nuclear program. President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad dismissed any hopes for rapprochement between Iran and the U.S.

"These sanctions are like used tissues which should be thrown in the trash," the Iranian leader

said after the vote, according to ISNA, a state-run news agency.

Russia and China, which have strong economic ties with Tehran and have at times resisted sanctions, fully backed the new U.N. move to blacklist 40 Iranian military, industrial and shipping firms, along with other measures. President Barack Obama said the sanctions would be vigorously enforced.

"This council has risen to its responsibilities. Now Iran should choose a wiser course," U.S. Ambassador Susan Rice told the council after the vote.

"The vote sends an unmistakable message about the international community's commitment to stopping the spread of nuclear weapons," Obama said at the White House. "Whether it is threatening the nuclear non-proliferation regime, or the human rights of its own citizens, or stability of its own neighbors by supporting terrorism, the Iranian government continues to demonstrate that its own unjust actions are a threat to justice everywhere."

The resolution passed the 15-nation Security Council with 12 votes in favor. Brazil and Turkey voted against and Lebanon abstained.

Veteran journalist Helen Thomas retires after remarks about Israel

Obama calls her comments 'offensive'

WASHINGTON-- Veteran White House correspondent Helen Thomas, who has covered every president since John F. Kennedy, retired Monday after coming under scrutiny for saying that Jews in Israel should "get the hell out of Palestine" and "go home" to Germany and Poland.

President Barack Obama said that Thomas' comments were "out of line" but added it was a "shame" her long, much celebrated career had to end in controversy. He called her retirement "the right decision."

Thomas, 89, had covered the White House since 1960 but served as a columnist for Hearst News Service for the past decade. She was known as a trailblazer for women journalists.

Thomas made the remarks, which were widely disseminated on the Internet, at a May 27 White House Jewish heritage event. Rabbi David Nesenoff asked her if she had any comments on Israel. Thomas replied: "Tell them to get the hell out of Palestine...Remember, these people are occupied and it's their land."

When additionally asked about where the Israelis should go, she replied, "They should go home to Poland and Germany...America and everywhere else." Thomas subsequently issued an apology.

The fallout did not end there. Her agency, Nine Speakers, Inc. announced they had dropped Thomas as a client, due to her remarks. Later,

a Washington high school, Walt Whitman, canceled a graduation speech she was supposed to deliver next week. Instead, the school has chosen veteran CBS journalist Bob Schieffer as her replacement.

Hearst Corporation announced that Thomas' retirement was "effective immediately." Just minutes before the White House Correspondents Association disassociated itself from her remarks.

Thomas hasn't exactly hid her politics on the Middle East conflict during her long tenure. The day after Israeli Defense Forces stormed the Turkish flotilla recently, she pressed White House press secretary Robert Gibbs as to how the administration could stand by the blockade of Gaza and the border treatment of Palestinians by the Israeli government.

Now Thomas's front row seat during White House briefings is up for grabs. Some reporters are betting that either Fox News or Bloomberg News may move up from the second row. There is a possibility that the White House Correspondents Association--which controls seating in the briefing room--may continue giving the seat to that day's rotating pool reporter, which had been done when Thomas was out sick.

However, Ann Compton, a veteran White House reporter with ABC News, may be the favorite.

Van der Sloot confesses to killing Lima woman, murder charges expected Friday



received a call from someone looking for van der Sloot about 11 p.m. June 1. The receptionist forwarded the call, but no one answered. The hotel worker assumed that van der Sloot was sleeping because the room key was with him and not at the front desk.

About an hour later, according to the police report, the receptionist noticed that van der Sloot owed money for two nights and went up to his room, where her knocks were unanswered. The television

LIMA, Peru-- Joran van der Sloot gave a tearful confession Monday night to killing 21-year-old Stephany Flores Ramirez May 30, Peruvian authorities said.

Van der Sloot was moved to a cell at the prosecutor's office Thursday as officials prepared to file murder charges following what they called a remarkably complete confession in the beating and strangling death of Flores.

Van der Sloot, 22, has been a prime suspect in the 2005 disappearance of Natalee Holloway in Aruba. He is a Dutch citizen.

Flores, a business student, met Van der Sloot while playing poker at a casino. Later, she was found in his hotel room beaten to death, her neck broken. Van der Sloot told authorities that Flores had found some information on his laptop computer that tied him to the disappearance of Holloway.

"I did not want to do it," he is said to have told authorities.

"The girl intruded into my private life." Police released video on Saturday from hotel security cameras that shows the two entering Van der Sloot's hotel room at 5 a.m. and van der Sloot leaving alone four hours later with his bags. On Thursday, a video showing Flores and van der Sloot at the casino was also released.

A Peruvian police report leaked Monday said that Flores was found in van der Sloot's hotel room half dressed. The report also provides new details about the hours before Flores' body was found.

According to the document, The Hotel Tac

Karzai condemns Taliban execution of boy, 7

KABUL, Afghanistan-- Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai condemned the Taliban's execution of a 7-year-old boy, accusing him of spying for the government. The execution took place Tuesday in the Sangin district of Helmand province, said provincial government spokesman Dawould Ahmadi.

During a news conference Thursday, Karzai said officials were looking into reports of the execution. "I don't think there's a crime bigger than that the most inhuman forces on earth can

commit," he said. "A 7-year-old boy cannot be a spy. A 7-year-old boy cannot be anything but a 7-year-old boy, and therefore hanging or shooting to kill a 7-year-old boy is a crime against humanity."

"If this is true, it is an absolutely horrific crime," added British Prime Minister David Cameron who attended the news conference on an unannounced stop in Kabul. "If true, I think it says more about the Taliban than any book, than any article, than any speech could ever say."