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Seat Roland Burris
African American Leadership
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BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board

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Ethics are important in government and if Roland Burris had received his appointment to the U. S. Senate as a result of a discovered deal with Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich I would have been the first to reject it. However, we have just gone through an election in which Barack Obama did not really choose his moment to run, it was literally thrust upon him by his popularity, and so the moment chose him. Likewise, the situation in which Burris finds himself was not made entirely by him, he has accepted an appointment made, no doubt, to improve the image of the Governor, but that will amount to very little if he is indicted and convicted of having attempted to sell the Senate seat to which he has now appointed Roland Burris, or for other crimes he has committed.

Otherwise, I can find no reason to join with those who oppose Burris's acceptance of the appointment: Blagojevich is the legitimate seated Governor of the State of Illinois; he has carried out a Constitutional duty in appointing Roland Burris to the vacant Senate seat left by Barack Obama; Burris appears not to have been involved at all in the Governor's charges of corruption in office; and he is eminently qualified to hold the seat. So what this amount to is guilt by association when the association is far from having been established.

In this case, people have said that the seat is "tainted" and while I know what they mean, I can't quite give the "taint" theory the preeminent status that some have. Do they mean that all of the actions Blagojevich has taken are "tainted" and as such should be held up - other executive actions such as bills signed, regulations made, and etc.? Should they all be exculpated or held up? They haven't been. If they mean that the seat is "tainted" how do they justify that when the person appointed has not been

involved in the Governor's problems. If they mean that he would come into the Senate under a cloud, whose cloud is it, his or the Governor's and why is the Senate not able to make that distinction?

Politics is an interesting, but also sometimes gritty game and those who survive it must master timing as well as qualifications. I have great respect for Danny Davis who rejected the appointment for obvious reasons, because he is someone of great integrity. And as much as I would prefer that he serve, I privilege more having a black person in the United States Senate -- not under any circumstances -- but given this situation, someone who is willing, experienced and qualified enough to plow through the fog of politics that surrounds this appointment to ultimately secure the seat. I have been an observer of American politics for a long time and have seen some strange things their colleagues have done that member of Congress were willing to ignore.

I favor taking advantage of a situation that blacks did not create. It was created by the absence of blacks in the Senate until Obama came along, and the possible return to that condition now that he has left. Burris is not responsible for that, he is putting himself forward in a gutsy attempt to correct it. He ran for Governor in the state of Illinois and lost, he ran for Senate from that state and lost, but he was the Comptroller for three terms and Attorney General for one term, the only black elected official to wins state-wide before Carol Moseley Braun won her Senate seat.

There is no assurance in Illinois politics that if Blagojevich is taken out of the appointment process, and the Lt Governor or the State Assembly makes the appointment, such that the process by which the person would be chosen to have the seat would pristine, or that a black person would be chosen. Indeed, the possibility --and the danger -- is that a much larger set of politics would enter into the decision not now envisioned. But by putting himself forward as someone who is otherwise qualified and not involved in the Governor's scandal, it will be more difficult to reject Burris or another black candidate if the appointment process changes than if he had not accepted the appointment.

It always strikes me as strange when I hear people saying that race was "injected" into an issue when race was there all along, but they either couldn't see it or ignored it, until it was unavoidable. The absence of blacks in the Senate is a racial problem. The fact that the District of Columbia has no representation in the Senate -- because the person elected is likely to be black -- is a racial problem. No one "injected" race into this problem, it is racial by nature. It is a tough fact that some are made uncomfortable by the manner in which Roland Burris is attempting to claim the right of fifteen percent of the American people to be represented in the United States Senate. Why penalize us for the process and how pristine should we be?

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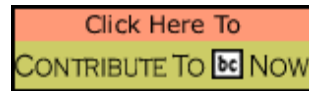
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