



# MARCH ON THE CAPITOL

## Case Study - Crisis Communication

Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich had been accused of trying to sell his appointment to the U.S. Senate – to fill the seat vacated by President-Elect Obama. Democratic leaders warned Blagojevich not to make an appointment because it would be “tainted”.

But Blagojevich got the better of them when he went ahead and legally appointed former Illinois Attorney General Roland Burris to the Senate. Nobody could credibly accuse the former attorney general of buying the seat and nobody had ever questioned his integrity.



[caption] Senate Democratic leaders created a crisis when they dug in their heels and refused to seat Burris in the Senate. President-Elect Obama doubled-down and supported Senate Democrats.



[caption] Although there was no legal basis to block a state's legal appointment, Burris wouldn't be sworn-in as senator without fighting and demanding the law be followed.

Bud Jackson joined the Burris team to devise a strategy to beat back the baseless actions of Democratic leaders. The legal team would fight them in court and Jackson would help fight them in the court of public opinion by devising a plan to march on the Capitol and to force the Senate to illegally refuse Burris' entry. The media event would shine a spotlight on the inappropriate action and force the hand of Senate leaders.



[caption] Bud Jackson leads Senator-Designate Roland Burris through the media and to the U.S. Capitol so Burris could demand to be seated in the United State Senate

The march was a massive media scrum carried live by cable news networks. Burris and his team met inside the Capitol with the Sergeant of Arms, then with Senator Reid. But as expected Burris was not allowed to take his seat in the Senate. Burris exited the Capitol for a news conference to announce that Senate leaders had blocked his appointment.



[caption] The whole country had watched Burris being turned away. The spectacle led the national news that day and into the next day's major newspapers. Talk shows were lit-up with debates about the power struggle.

The strategy was working and Democratic leaders were under intense public pressure.





[caption] Days later Senate leaders and President-Elect Obama abruptly caved and reversed their opposition. They agreed to let Burriss assume his seat in the Senate.



[caption] The Vice-President swears in Roland Burriss as the U.S. Senator from Illinois

*“Only last week, Democratic leaders had declared that Mr. Burriss’s appointment by Gov. Rod R. Blagojevich “will ultimately not stand.”*

– NYT 1/7/09

*Mr. Obama also said last week that Mr. Burriss should not be seated.”*

– NYT 1/7/09