

A Stricken State

I took the tv away from the kids today (not that they watch it that much anyway) so I can watch the events in Illinois unfold as their governor Rod Blagojevich is arrested on corruption charges. No surprise there, just an interesting story being followed by a former resident of that state. In fact, we left Illinois for good in 2003 just months after Blago assumed office, which was mostly a coincidence, but I would say that his being elected to the governor's office did add to the feeling we had that the state was falling apart. It was that obvious from the beginning that Blago was no good. Over the years, I've been following news stories in Illinois by reading dailyherald.com, an online version of a suburban newspaper. Every time there was anything in the paper related to Blago, there was no shortage of comments from readers about the purported corruption of the governor. In October of this year, the governor's approval rating was a measly 4%. And today, the you-know-what has hit the fan. The governor of Illinois is in prison – the second gov in a row from that state to serve time, as a matter of fact. As we speak, err, as you read this, former Illinois Governor George Ryan is probably watching the Blagojevich coverage from the federal prison he currently calls home. I'm just curious if it makes anyone nervous that our new President-elect is from a state that can't seem to keep its leaders out of the slammer. Hopefully, Barack Obama can set a new standard for politicians from Illinois – that would be refreshing.

But in the meantime, watching Blago's saga unfold is compelling – the reporters on CNN are saying that the breadth of the corruption is unimaginable. They're saying Blago engaged in a 'crime spree' while in office and the details are troubling – including allegations of \$8 million in funding being pulled from a children's hospital because its CEO did not contribute \$50,000 to Blago's campaign. And I'm

not writing this to pick on Blago or make any sort of political statement – it's not that I'm the type of person who smiles at the misfortune of others either, but hey, he did this to himself. I just feel badly for the residents of Illinois who trusted this man to be their leader and their representative, and now they're forced to watch with the rest of the world while he is exposed for what he truly is, giving their state a horrible reputation in the process. The main victims in this situation are the Blagojevich family, and it's sad that Rod's two young children will probably have to grow up now without a father in their lives. And unfortunately, Blagojevich is just the latest in a long line of corrupt officials from the Land of Lincoln. Since the early 1970's, 3 former Illinois governors have served time in prison, not including Blagojevich who is a current governor. Here's to hoping the politicians of Illinois can get their act together amidst their growing tradition of disreputableness.