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Lengthy deliberations in Blagojevich case no surprise to local attorneys

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The fact that jurors in Chicago are entering their seventh day today in the corruption trial of former Gov. Rod Blagojevich and his brother, Robert, shouldn't be a surprise, local attorneys say.

"What it means is jurors take their jobs very, very seriously," said Springfield defense attorney Mark Wykoff. "It's one of the highest civil callings a citizen can be asked to do, to sit in judgment of another human being."

Ryan Cadagin, a former assistant state's attorney now in private practice, said the complexity of the charges justifies the lengthy deliberations.

"It's been a long trial with a number of charges, so it's not surprising they've been out this long," he said. "There also were jury instructions for each charge, and it takes a long time to digest that much information."

Rod Blagojevich is charged with 24 counts including wire fraud and racketeering, and his fundraising brother faces four counts.

"You can't read anything into it," Sangamon County first assistant state's attorney John Milhiser said of the length of the deliberations.

"There was a lot of evidence, a lot of counts and lengthy jury instructions," he said. "They're going through the evidence and applying it to the law."

Springfield defense attorney Jon Gray Noll once had a client facing a one-count indictment in federal court, and the jury was out 3 1/2 days.

"This is a 110-page indictment, and some of the 24 counts are interrelated," he said. "It's complex."

Noll also pointed out that the reading of jury instructions, normally a 15- to 20-minute process, required more than an hour in the two-month Blagojevich trial.

“And to some degree, a celebrity trial requires a celebrity jury,” Noll said. “They want to be able to say we argued about this, we looked at that.”

Wykoff also thinks jurors are taking seriously the instructions given them by U.S. Judge James Zagel.

“I personally think they’ll be out a long time,” he said. “They clearly know it’s not a run-of-the-mill criminal case. They know the gravity of this case, and they want to get it right.”

Wykoff noted that the jury that convicted former Gov. George Ryan had fewer counts to consider and was out for 10 business days.

“I don’t expect anything before the end of next week,” he said. “The longer they are out is a testament that they are doing their jobs.”

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