

Judge nixes Costa Rica trip for ex-Ill. governor

By **MIKE ROBINSON**
Associated Press Writer

A federal judge told ousted Gov. Rod Blagojevich on Tuesday to forget about starring in a reality TV show in the Costa Rican jungle and focus instead on the corruption charges that could send him to prison for years.

"I don't think this defendant fully understands and I don't think he could understand ... the position he finds himself in," U.S. District Judge James B. Zagel said in denying the impeached and indicted former governor permission to leave the country.

Blagojevich, 52, has pleaded not guilty to racketeering, fraud and other charges that allege he schemed to sell or trade President

Barack Obama's former U.S. Senate seat and plotted to use the muscle of the governor's office to pressure companies for campaign money.

Blagojevich had hoped to make some money to support his family by heading to Costa Rica in June to be on NBC's "I'm a Celebrity ... Get Me Out of Here!" — a program similar to "Survivor" — while attorneys in Chicago worked on his case.

But Zagel said his time would be better spent helping his lawyers cope with the mound of documentary evidence prosecutors will soon turn over to the defense.

Zagel said it's often the case that "the defendant never understands ... the jeopardy he is in" until he comes face to face with the evidence and so far Blagojevich has not experienced that.

After the hearing, Blagojevich insisted he's "going to play a very big role" in his defense.

"I'm fully aware of what the allegations are and I know what the truth is concerning me and I know that I've done absolutely nothing wrong," he said.

In another bleak moment for the defense, Assistant U.S. Attorney Reid Schar told the court he expects former Blagojevich chiefs of staff John Harris and Alonzo Monk to soon agree to plead guilty to related charges and testify for the prosecution if Blagojevich stands trial.

Schar also said Blagojevich could be looking at 25 to 30 years behind bars under advisory federal sentencing guidelines if he is convicted. Schar said there was no way to predict what Blagojevich might do if allowed to go south of

the border.

Blagojevich stood silent at the hearing except to whisper occasionally to defense attorney Sheldon Sorosky but said afterward he would not have fled had he been allowed to go to Costa Rica.

"I have no intention of not going to court," Blagojevich said.

"I'm approaching this case as a way to be able to show the people of Illinois just how honest I've been as governor and how much I've worked on their behalf," he said before leaving the courthouse.

Sorosky told Zagel that NBC producers had volunteered to pay for retired marshals or FBI agents to make sure Blagojevich wouldn't run away from the television show. But the judge said the point was that Blagojevich should stay to work on his case.

An attorney for Blagojevich's

brother, who also has pleaded not guilty in the case, said NBC had been contacted about possibly moving the show to the U.S. to comply with Blagojevich's bond.

"What are they going to watch the show for, Costa Rica or him?" said defense attorney Michael Ettinger.

But NBC issued a statement saying that while the network is "disappointed in the court's decision ... There are no plans to move the show to a location in the United States."

Zagel did say he might allow Blagojevich to tap his \$2 million campaign fund to pay lawyers. So far, Sorosky, an old friend, is the former governor's only lawyer of record and he has indicated more attorneys are needed to work on the case.

Zagel set a May 1 hearing on the campaign fund issue.

Lawyer: USS Cole families to get at least \$200K

By **LARRY O'DELL**
Associated Press Writer

Nearly nine years after 17 sailors were killed in a terrorist attack on the USS Cole, some relatives of the victims are set to receive at least \$200,000 each from Sudan, a lawyer said Tuesday.

The 33 spouses, parents and children of the sailors have fought in court for the compensation for six years. They successfully argued the Sudanese government provided support, including money and training, that allowed al-Qaida suicide bombers to attack the Navy destroyer at a refueling stop at the Yemen port of Aden on Oct. 12, 2000. The suicide bombers were in a small boat and tore a gaping 40-foot hole in the destroyer.

The U.S. government had frozen the money in New York banks, but a federal judge recently ordered the release of \$13.4 million in Sudanese accounts.

"Not one penny can replace the life of my child," said Mona Gunn of Virginia Beach, whose 22-year-old son Cherone was killed in the attack. "The sad thing is, not all family members are receiving compensation. There are mothers and fathers

who lost children who aren't going to get compensation, and siblings who lost a brother or sister."

Twenty-six other parents who sued Sudan were not eligible for compensation, which went instead to their child's spouse or children, a judge in Norfolk, Va., ruled in 2007.

The Sudanese government didn't fight the case during a trial, but has refused to pay the families. A spokesman for the Sudanese Embassy in Washington said Tuesday the country had nothing to do with the attack.

"It didn't take place on Sudan soil or water, and there is no Sudanese involvement in it," said spokesman Seif Yasin. "There's no proof Sudan provided any financial support for anyone involved."

U.S. District Judge Kimba Wood's order freed the funds under the Terrorism Risk Insurance Act of 2002, which requires the release of blocked assets to satisfy a judgment against a "terrorist party." The State Department has designated Sudan as a state sponsor of terrorism since 1993, Wood said.

Individual awards will range from about \$200,000 to \$1.2 million, according to Andrew C. Hall, an attorney for the families.

Hall said the family members, including those previously denied compensation, will also seek pain and suffering payment under a new law passed by Congress last year. The Death on the High Seas Act allowed the Norfolk judge to award compensation only for lost wages and earning potential.

The additional compensation sought under the new law could amount to about \$50 million, Hall said. The families originally sought more than \$100 million.

"It's been a long fight for these people, and hopefully this is the first step," he said.

Thomas Wibberley of Williamsport, Md., who son, Seaman Apprentice Craig Bryan Wibberley, was killed in the attack said the money should help children of the victims.

"They're going to get a good amount of this money and get trust funds, and they're the ones to be taken care of," he said.

John Clodfelter of Mechanicsville, Va., is among those who sued but was not eligible for an award because his son Kenneth left a wife and a son, now 10. Nonetheless, he was pleased with Wood's decision.

"It's about time something was done," Clodfelter said. "It's taken so much more time than we thought it should take."

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