



Jesse Jackson Resigns Congressional Seat Amid Federal Probe

Jesse Jackson Jr., Democratic congressman from Illinois and son of the “civil rights” agitator, has resigned his House seat, citing ill health and an ongoing federal investigation for what Jackson referred to as “my share of mistakes.” While the investigation reportedly involves the misuse of campaign funds, “Jackson was also under a House Ethics Committee investigation over dealings with imprisoned ex-Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich,” reported the Associated Press. Although the committee could still release a report into its findings, Jackson’s resignation will prevent Congress from taking any action against him should it be revealed that he committed any wrongdoing.



On November 21, two weeks after his Illinois constituents elected him to a ninth congressional term, Jackson sent a letter to House Speaker John Boehner tendering his resignation, citing his ongoing treatment for bipolar disorder, as well as the federal probe. While thus far the 47-year-old Jackson has not been charged with any wrongdoing, in his letter to the House Speaker he wrote that “I am doing my best to address this situation responsibly, cooperate with the investigators, and accept responsibility for my mistakes, for they are my mistakes and mine alone.”

The resignation prompted a statement from Jackson’s attorneys, who confirmed that their client was cooperating with the federal probe. “We hope to negotiate a fair resolution of the matter,” read a prepared statement, “but the process could take several months. During that time, we will have no further comment and urge you to give Mr. Jackson the privacy he needs to heal and handle these issues responsibly.”

Legal experts said Jackson’s resignation most likely came as the result of mounting evidence against the liberal Democratic congressman. “I think it won’t be too long before we hear an announcement of a plea agreement,” Bruce Reinhart, a white-collar defense lawyer and former federal prosecutor, told the AP. “The government doesn’t like people who are going to plead guilty to abusing public office to remain in a position of public trust.... Resignation would be a significant bargaining chip for Congressman Jackson in order to get a better deal from the government.”

The [Chicago Tribune](#) noted that Jackson’s political career began in 1995 in the midst of scandal, when he was first sent to Congress after winning a special election to replace Democratic Congressman Mel Reynolds, who resigned after he was convicted of sexual assault. Early on it was expected that Jackson would be able to use his father’s ultra-leftist reputation and record as a stepping stone to a stellar political career that would perhaps land him in the White House, a position the elder Jackson had coveted. “I grew up in a house with great expectations,” he told the *Tribune* in 1995 in response to questions about his political ambitions.

But over the years those ambitions were largely unrealized as Jackson offered little in the way of



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on November 22, 2012

Democratic policymaking, ultimately serving as little more than a rubber stamp for liberal notions such as “gay” rights, abortion legislation, and President Obama’s 2008 financial “bailout.”

Jackson himself sponsored little successful legislation, and in recent years, reported the *Tribune*, was known mostly for repeatedly introducing “a series of quixotic constitutional amendments guaranteeing rights he said were grounded in the [UN] Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The amendments never got anywhere.”

Rep. Jackson’s political troubles began in earnest in connection with former Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich’s criminal conviction for attempting to sell President-elect Barack Obama’s U.S. Senate seat to the highest bidder. According to the *Chicago Tribune*, “Jackson’s attorney acknowledged his client was ‘Senate Candidate No. 5,’ an unnamed politician Blagojevich — in a conversation wiretapped by federal prosecutors — said had sent an emissary who promised to raise more than \$1 million for the governor’s campaign war chest in exchange for Obama’s seat.”

In June of this year Jackson took a medical leave from his congressional seat to be treated for bipolar disorder, as well as gastrointestinal issues, and has spent little time in Washington since, leading to speculation that his days were numbered there. The elder Jackson insisted that his son resigned due to his physical and emotional condition. “He made the decision to choose his health,” said the Rev. Jackson, adding that he did not know how long it would take his son to recover from his “internal unresolved challenge. It’s not the kind of illness you can put a timetable on.”

In his resignation letter Jackson said that for the past 17 years “I have given 100 percent of my time, energy, and life to public service. However, over the past several months, as my health has deteriorated, my ability to serve the constituents of my district has continued to diminish. Against the recommendations of my doctors, I had hoped and tried to return to Washington and continue working on the issues that matter most to the people of the Second District. I know now that will not be possible.” Alluding to the ongoing investigation and his acknowledged “mistakes,” Jackson wrote that he prayed he would be remembered “for what I did right.”

Following congressional protocol, Jackson’s resignation, the second this session, will be officially announced to his colleagues on the Tuesday following the Thanksgiving holiday. Illinois law mandates that Governor Pat Quinn, a fellow Democrat, call a special election to fill the seat for the 2nd District, which covers Chicago’s south side and extends to Kankakee.

The district is largely urban, and Laura Washington, an analyst familiar with Chicago politics, told the [New York Times](#) that “every other African-American politician I talk to on the South Side is thinking about running” for the seat. Among those being suggested as Jackson’s replacement are his wife, Sandi Jackson, alderman for Chicago’s Seventh Ward, as well as Jackson’s brother Jonathan.

As for Rep. Jackson’s future, Chicago’s local [ABC news affiliate](#) noted that should he ultimately be convicted of criminal wrongdoing, his pension might be affected as the result of legislation sponsored by Illinois’ Republican U.S. Senator Mark Kirk. According to the news affiliate, “the National Taxpayers Union estimates that taxpayers spend more than \$800,000 annually on the pensions of corrupt former members of Congress. These disgraced notable congressmen all received annual pensions despite being convicted of corruption.”

Political observers speculate that the timing of Jackson’s resignation, and a plea agreement brokered by his attorneys, may ultimately add Jackson to that infamous list.

Photo of Jesse Jackson Jr.: AP Images



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