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# Judge to shield Blagojevich trial jurors' identities

May 17, 2010 9:15 PM

In a controversial decision revealed today, the federal judge presiding over former Gov. Rod Blagojevich's corruption trial said he intends to keep the identities of jurors secret until a verdict is reached.

Judges usually impose such restrictions out of fear there could be an attempt at jury tampering -- such as in a mob trial. But U.S. District Judge James Zagel said his reasoning was different and prompted by the realities of the Internet age.

Zagel said he is afraid that revealing the names of jurors in the high-profile case would tempt bloggers to contact them during the ex-governor's trial.

Prospective jurors as well as those ultimately selected to decide Blagojevich's fate will be identified only by numbers until after the trial is completed, the judge said. Jury selection in the Blagojevich case is scheduled to begin June 3.

Zagel made the disclosure Monday as he discussed ground rules with reporters who will be covering the trial.

The judge also said that before the verdict, he would not release a copy of the extensive pretrial questionnaires that prospective jurors fill out.

At a status hearing in open court earlier Monday, Zagel said scores of initial mailings sent to people in a special jury pool already are being returned. Asked if they have the ability to serve on a jury trial that could last 17 weeks, more than 90 have said they can, Zagel said.

Also Monday, defense lawyers revealed in a motion that the government secretly recorded 5,500 conversations during the Blagojevich investigation, but prosecutors plan to play tapes of just 97 of them during the trial.

-- Jeff Coen and Bob Sexter

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