

Blago's speech: An enjoyable drama

By [Anastasia Golovashkina](#)

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Earlier this month I had the opportunity to hear [Rod Blagojevich](#) address a high school civics and debate convention in Oak Brook. The Junior Statesmen of America sought a no-nonsense dialogue about real-world politics; we got a real-world ex-politician, a glimpse at political nonsense and an eloquent monologue that somehow passed for an open-forum discourse.

I imagined that Blagojevich would paste a collage of mindless statements — "It's (expletive) golden!" "We do everything right!" "I'm blacker than Barack Obama!" — into something close to a quasi-cohesive speech. The newspaper editorials surrounding his best sound bites misled me to expect a man made up of sound bites alone. I did not expect a former governor. I expected the quintessential fool of Illinois politics.

My immediate reaction? This man is no fool. This man is an outstanding, intelligent and enticing public speaker.

In spite of his well-publicized fall from political grace, the former Illinois governor has not forgotten the lessons that won him office in the first place. Upon arriving, he shook my hand — and thereafter, the hand of every person who was within 3 feet of him. He shook the hands of our organization's sponsors, the police officers hired to protect him, the hotel concierge. He shook the hands of two janitors, a woman attempting to exit the bathroom and reporters.

The nostalgic luminance of the oncoming cameramen elated him, and he shook my hand — again.

Indeed, the three-minute sequence that constituted the former governor's arrival featured some of the most action-packed corridor maneuvering I had ever seen. Just before we reached the cameras, Blagojevich turned to me and asked where I — "with a long last name like Golovashkina" — had been born.

The question is a common one. I responded truthfully. Little did I know what would come next.

Blagojevich proceeded to manipulate our one-minute dialogue — perhaps the governor's sole dialogue all morning — into a chance to "connect" with his audience:

"My parents were, like Anastasia's parents, hardworking immigrants who came to this country because of our government's unique freedoms ..."

It is ironic that he used my heritage to take a self-indulgent and agenda-fitting shot of personal promotion. The most "unique" freedom that the United States has to offer is freedom from perversion; the liberating notion that the world's oldest in-use paper Constitution can iron out the kinks of political corruption better than any of its younger counterparts.

Blagojevich was just as deliberate with his rhetoric as he had been with his extravagant entrance. I expected him to season his speech with dashes of his political agenda; I did not expect just how much of his presentation would consist of personal pleas for vindication. Last year, jurors deadlocked on 23 of the 24 counts against the ex-governor in his first corruption trial. He was found guilty on one count of lying to the FBI. On April 20, he faces a retrial on counts on which the jury deadlocked.

I left his speech with a newfound understanding of political packaging. An unexpected lesson, however, came from adults.

In the weeks leading up to our convention, our organization received emails that condemned us (the writers assumed that we were adults) for hosting him. The ignorant language in the emails revealed just how little the writers knew about our organization.

A mother wrote: "If I wanted a role model for my kids, the first person I'd think of would be a foul-mouthed convicted felon? Effin' golden idea there pal! Do you have children of your own? Is this how you want to influence students? Since when does 'real-world success' come in impeachment from office, a reality show or a pistachio endorsement ... ?"

Much like I had based my impression of the former governor on amusing quotes, so, too, do adults base their archetypical adolescent on pop culture's most amusing, albeit distortional, elements. Teenagers often are dismissed as being easily "influenced."

The purpose of inviting Blagojevich to our convention was not to donate an audience to his pleas for vindication. The purpose was to vindicate ourselves.

The distortional perspectives of teenage-themed programs like "Jersey Shore" and young-adult novels like the "Twilight" series encourage grown-ups to look down on teenage culture, dismissing it as immature or ignorant. Tanned vampires, however, make up a negligible portion of all that we bring to the socioeconomic potluck.

Sure, we watch episodes of "Jersey Shore" and we read the "Twilight" series. But there is so much more to us than what we're given credit for.

That April weekend I learned that Rod Blagojevich is no fool.

But you know what?

Neither are we.

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