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Blagojevich preaches about health, tax plans

By Pam G. Dempsey

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DANVILLE – Gov. Rod Blagojevich spoke about Jesus. He spoke about the golden rule.

To the couple hundred people who attended his visit at Laura Lee Fellowship Hall on Thursday night, he said, "This is the Armageddon, and we are on the side of the Lord."

Blagojevich's stop in Danville was the end of a weeklong tour across the state to promote his \$7.6 billion gross receipts tax plan. The tax would create a health care plan for adults and generate more money for schools, government pensions and property tax relief. Businesses grossing \$2 million or more in sales would be required to pay the tax. When he proposed the tax during his combined State of the State speech and budget message to legislators, he called his plan a moral imperative.

"Some who believe in Christ follow the ... golden rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," Blagojevich said Thursday. "We need to put a little more love in our policy and think about others."

Residents, the governor said, are entitled to the same health care benefits that he, and state legislators, have. Every child needs quality education. But the money to pay for it should come from the people who have it, he said.

The average chief executive officer makes 400 times more than the average worker, Blagojevich said.

"How can you possibly ask a working man or working woman making \$50,000 to pay another \$1,000 out of his pocket to pay for this?" he said.

Stephanie Johnson and her daughter Ashley came to hear Blagojevich and joined the crowd of people around the governor, who had stepped down from his podium to mingle.

"Everything he said was right. He answered everything I wanted to ask," Johnson said.

Stewart Mercer, a member of a local machinist union, said he also attended to hear what the governor had to say.

"They are all good ideas, but how are we going to carry them through?" Mercer asked. "Too many people need their jobs; they need their salaries."

Physician assistant Kirk Melton came dressed in a white medical coat and stethoscope. He said he wanted to talk to the governor about the high electricity rates and how they were affecting his patients.

"I have one woman who makes \$675 a month in Social Security, but her power bill is \$450," Melton said. "I have to meet this man."

Melton did and later said that his brief talk with Blagojevich made him a little bit more comfortable, but "I'm also a cynic."

"He said he was trying to go for the people in power," Melton recounted. "There's not enough people bulldogging for the average joe."

Before Blagojevich's arrival, Tom Baird, senior engineer at MT Systems, watched from across the street. MT Systems is located next door to Laura Lee Fellowship House. Two large signs on the property, one bordering each side of the firm's property, spelled out "NO GROSS RECEIPT TAX" in large black letters.

"I appreciate the effort to give people health care," Baird said, "but on the other side of the coin, we should look at the root cause – why is health care so high. If this goes through, it'll be the spilled milk they're talking about five years from now."

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