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Obama to Leave His Senate Seat

By Jeff Zeleny

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WASHINGTON – President-elect Barack Obama intends to step down from his seat in the United States Senate on Sunday, leaving his seat just as lawmakers return to Washington for a lame-duck Congressional session.

Mr. Obama's decision allows him to avoid participating in next week's session on Capitol Hill. The seat will remain empty until Gov. Rod Blagojevich appoints a successor to fill out the remaining two years of the term, which he said he would do by year's end.

"It has been one of the highest honors and privileges of my life to have served the people of Illinois in the United States Senate," Mr. Obama said in a statement on Thursday afternoon.

While Mr. Obama will play a behind-the-scenes role in the economic stimulus legislation debated in Congress during the lame-duck session, advisers said he wanted to avoid the awkward position of returning to the Senate to cast a ballot should his vote be needed. By stepping down from his post now, the pressure intensifies on Mr. Blagojevich to name a replacement.

Mr. Obama is leaving his seat as the junior senator from Illinois two months shy of the four-year anniversary of the date he was sworn in. At the time, some of his aides hinted that he would serve only one term, but replacing Mr. Blagojevich was his leading option, not running for president.

"In a state that represents the crossroads of a nation, I have met so many men and women who've taken different journeys, but hold common hopes for their children's future," Mr. Obama said in his statement. "It is these Illinois families and their stories that will stay with me as I leave the United States Senate and begin the hard task of fulfilling the simple hopes and common dreams of all Americans as our nation's next president."

Vice President-elect Joseph R. Biden Jr., Democrat of Delaware, has not said when he intends to step down from his seat.

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