

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Roland Burris

PERSON

Burris, Roland W.

Alternative Names: The Honorable Roland Burris; Roland W. Burris

Life Dates: August 3, 1937-

Place of Birth: Centralia, Illinois, USA

Residence: Chicago, IL

Work: Chicago, IL

Occupations: State Attorney General; State Comptroller; U.S. Senator

Biographical Note

Born in Centralia, Illinois, on August 30, 1937, Roland Burris received his bachelor's degree in political science from Southern Illinois University at Carbondale in 1959. He then studied at the University of Hamburg, Germany, for a year before entering law school at Howard University.

Burris began his career in 1963 as a national bank examiner for the U.S. Treasury Department. This gave him the honor of being the first African American to examine banks in the United States. From 1964 to 1973, he served as vice president of Continental Illinois National Bank, making significant contacts in both the corporate and African American communities. Burris began his government career in 1973 as director of the Illinois Department of General Services. In 1978, with his election to the first of three terms as state comptroller, he made history as the first African American elected to state office. On November 6, 1990, Roland W. Burris was elected attorney general for the state of Illinois. At that time, the only African American ranking higher in state office was Douglas Wilder, the governor of Virginia. He served as Illinois attorney general from 1991 to 1995. In 1998, Burris unsuccessfully ran for the office of Governor of the State of Illinois.

After his public service career, Burris worked as an attorney with the Peters law firm in Chicago, where he specialized in environmental, consumer affairs and estate law. Previously, he was managing partner of the Chicago-based law firm of Jones, Ware & Grenard, one of the largest minority law firms in the country.

Burris returned to public service on December 30, 2008 when Governor Rod

Blagojevich appointed him as a U.S. Senator, filling the seat formerly held by Barack Obama. On January 15, 2009, Burris was sworn in as a U.S. Senator, representing the State of Illinois.

Related Entries

Lincoln School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Centralia High School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Southern Illinois University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

B.S. in political science

University of Hamburg [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Howard University School of Law [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

J.D.

United States Comptroller of Currency, Chicago [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1963 to 1963]

Bank Examiner

Continental Illinois National Bank, Chicago [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1964 to 1972]

Started out as a tax accountant, ended as Second Vice President

Illinois Dept. of General Services [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1973 to 1978]

Director

State of Illinois [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1979 to 1990]

Comptroller

State of Illinois [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1991 to 1994]

Illinois Attorney General

Jones, Ware & Grenard [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1995 to 1998]

managing partner of law firm

Buford & Peters LLC [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1999 to 2002]

Counsel

Burris & Lebed Consulting LLC [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 2002 to ?]

manager and chief executive officer

Burris, Wright, Slaughter & Tom, LLC [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 2002 to ?]

Counsel

Operation PUSH (U.S.) [MEMBEROf]
[from ? to ?]

United States Jaycees [MEMBEROf]
[from ? to ?]