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**Prosecutors probe Mell's charges;**

**Were jobs traded for donations? Governor welcomes investigation**

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The explosive accusation that top jobs in Gov. Blagojevich's administration may be for sale took a dramatic turn Thursday when Attorney General Lisa Madigan and Cook County State's Attorney Richard Devine announced a joint investigation into the matter.

The probe was triggered by comments first published in Saturday's Chicago Sun-Times, by Blagojevich's father-in-law, Ald. Richard Mell (33rd), who accused the governor's chief fund-raiser, Christopher G. Kelly, of trading plum state appointments for $50,000 campaign contributions.

"We can confirm that we have requested information from the governor regarding the allegations made by Alderman Mell concerning the sale of appointments for political contributions," Madigan spokeswoman Melissa Merz said.

**Lisa Madigan seeks appointee list**

In Chicago, Blagojevich denied wrongdoing, welcomed the investigation and said his office would provide anything investigators seek to prove his administration is "as clean as a hound's tooth."

Neither Madigan nor Devine's office would go so far as to say crimes had been committed, though felony bribery and misconduct charges could arise if Mell's charge is substantiated, sources said.

Mell launched his attack at Blagojevich after aides to the governor linked him to a Joliet landfill the administration shut down last week because of violations.

On Monday, Madigan's office requested from the governor a roster of all appointees he has named to the dozens of state boards and commissions under his control since taking office. Also sought were the names, job titles and agencies of all other state employees that have been hired "in any capacity under the jurisdiction of the governor" since January 2003.

Blagojevich, who has $10.2 million in his campaign fund, has named numerous donors to key posts, including two former members of the state's scandal-plagued Health Facilities Planning Board, who each gave $25,000 about two weeks before being appointed. The governor denies any quid pro quo.

No one from the U.S. attorney's office has contacted Blagojevich's administration about Mell's statements, aides said. The governor has asked his inspector general to review the situation -- a move made two days after Blagojevich received the Madigan-Devine inquiry.

"What is great about these investigations, and why I welcome them and want them to happen as soon as possible and get done as soon as possible, is precisely what it will show: that the statements and accusations were reckless, they were defamatory, they were untrue, they were completely false. And we want independent groups to come out and say that," the governor told reporters.

**GOP sees Blagojevich PR stunt**

And in a challenge aimed directly at his father-in-law, the governor said: "Defamatory and false accusations, if you're going to make them, you'd better be able to back them up. And if you can't back them up, then you'd better step out there and say it."

True to his word earlier this week, when he vowed he would have nothing further to say about the family feud, Mell declined comment on Thursday's developments.

Republicans seized on the news of the Madigan-Devine probe and accused the governor of trying to supplant it by bringing in his inspector general to investigate.

"What's clear here is the governor, in another public relations stunt, tried to thwart the attorney general's investigation by asking his own inspector general to look into the accusations his father-in- law made," said Jason Gerwig, spokesman for the Illinois Republican Party. "Hopefully now that the attorney general is involved, the public will get the full and fair investigation they deserve."

In Saturday's Sun-Times, Mell accused Blagojevich of being so politically opportunistic that he would "throw anyone under the bus."

But the alderman's accusation against Kelly raised the biggest stink. Mell said the governor "raises $50,000 at a crack from his ace fund-raiser, Chris Kelly, who trades appointments to commissions for checks of $50,000."

**Fund-raiser denies allegations**

Kelly again denied wrongdoing Thursday. "It's sad that these allegations have brought us to where we are today. That being said, the allegations are 100 percent false."

Kelly was a source of controversy for the governor before the Mell flare-up. He runs a roofing venture that has received multimillion-dollar city contracts for work at O'Hare and Midway airports, and he has donated and loaned hundreds of thousands of dollars to Blagojevich's campaign.

In 2003, the governor tapped him to try to end the legal imbroglio snarling development of the state's last available casino license. Kelly's efforts failed.

Later, Kelly disclosed he had business ties to Emerald Casino investor Andrew Cherng, who stood to gain financially if Kelly's efforts were successful. Kelly said he didn't know Cherng held Emerald stock until after he finished working on the issue.