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**Ex-Metra CEO memo has explosive new revelations regarding Madigan**

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Staff reporters

House Speaker Michael Madigan not only lobbied Metra to give a pay hike to a Metra worker whose family had worked on Madigan's political campaigns but also "reportedly" tried to get someone else hired at the suburban rail agency, a newly released memo from ex-Metra CEO Alex Clifford indicates.

According, to the memo, Clifford said he was informed that he was being forced out of his job "for not complying with Speaker Madigan's requests for politically motivated employment actions."

Clifford informed the board in the memo that Metra Board Chairman Brad O'Halloran and board member Larry Huggins were concerned that failure to comply with Madigan's requests would "result in Metra losing future funding."

The explosive memo goes far beyond a description of it provided by Metra Board outside counsel Joe Gagliardo on Thursday to the House Mass Transit Committee, even though the Committee's chair, state Rep. Deb Mell, asked Gagliardo at least twice if he had summarized all the contents of the memo.

State Rep. Jack Franks (D-Marengo) noted that witnesses before the House Mass Transit committee were not sworn in, so there is "no legal recourse" for their failure to disclose to the Committee all the allegations in the Clifford memo.

Only two of 11 Metra Board members showed up Thursday to explain why Metra Board members approved a 26-month, maximum $718,000 separation agreement with Clifford when he had eight months left on his contract. The lone Metra board dissenter, Jack Schaffer, Thursday told the House Committee the payout was largely "hush money.''

Another new revelation in the memo is the accusation that O'Halloran wanted two Metra employees fired. Clifford wrote that the intervention was improper because hiring and firing was his responsibility.

O'Halloran and Huggins issued statements denying Clifford's charges.

"As I testified yesterday, I deny Mr. Clifford's allegations, but, out of an abundance of caution, immediately forwarded all of his claims to the [state] Inspector General," O'Halloran said.

"I have never intervened with Metra's staff regarding any jobs or contracts. The Board attempted a fair and unbiased review process for Mr. Clifford that was upended by his threatened legal strategy, which resuled in the settlement."

"I categorically deny Clifford's allegations," Huggins said.

In the memo, Clifford also wrote that when he spoke to O'Halloran about renewing his employment contract, "he told me that he needed to arrange a meeting with Speaker Madigan to assess 'what damage I have done' to Metra and its future funding by my refusal to accede to Speaker Madigan's requests."

Later, according to the memo, Clifford found out that O'Halloran and Huggins had decided to replace him when his contract expired with Alex Wiggins, Metra's Deputy Executive Director. Clifford wrote that he had documents confirming this.

"Mr. O'Halloran and Mr. Huggins have also said that I must go for not complying with Speaker Madigan's requests for politically motivated employment actions, which Mr. O'Halloran and Mr. Huggins may believe will result in Metra losing future funding," Clifford said in the memo.

Clifford also gave more details on how he says Madigan, through a Metra lobbyist and in a direct conversation with Huggins, requested a raise for Metra employee Patrick Ward. When Clifford did not comply, it resulted in an argument with Huggins, Clifford wrote.

Clifford asked Ward "why I was getting pressure from Speaker Madigan with regard to his salary."

"Mr. Ward said his family had supported Mr. Madigan for many years and worked on his political campaigns. He said that he had discussed his Metra employment with Mr. Madigan at a Madigan political event, where he told Mr. Madigan that he felt underpaid."

Clifford said Madigan also requested that Metra hire another individual, but he provided no more details on that revelation.

Asked about the new allegations, a Madigan aide stuck by a statement released by the speaker Thursday in which Madigan said he engaged in no wrongdoing while advocating a raise for Ward after a supervisor had deemed it warranted.

"I think the statement speaks for itself. It addresses the question of Ward," Madigan spokesman Steve Brown told the Chicago Sun-Times.

Brown offered this response when asked to shed more light about the conversation Madigan had with Ward about his pay at Metra.

"I think [Ward] made the point he'd been there a number of years. He was doing increased responsibilities, and his salary wasn't increased," Brown said.

Pressed on why the powerful House speaker would go to bat for Ward, Brown answered, "Somebody asked for help. That's what public officials do, day in and day out. People ask for help."

Brown went on to deny Friday's bombshell allegation by Clifford that his refusal to give Ward a raise or hire another job applicant being pushed by Madigan resulted in his dismissal from Metra.

"I have no idea what happened to Clifford. It sounded like he had a world of problems, including not knowing anything about railroads," Brown said.

Brown denied that Madigan interceded on another Metra job applicant's behalf, as Clifford alleged.

"There's no record of any other request," Brown said.

Brown said Madigan has not been interviewed or subpoenaed by Executive Inspector General Ricardo Meza's office in connection with Clifford's allegations.

Another point of contention in Clifford's memo was that Huggins was unhappy with Clifford's handling of the "Englewood Flyover" bridge project which Huggins believed did not direct enough money to African-American contractors, according to Clifford.

Clifford claimed Huggins refused to put the contract on the board's agenda for three months, during which Huggins sucessfully pressured the contractor to add a significant number of African American subcontractors.

Huggins also arranged for U.S. Rep. Bobby Rush (D-Ill.) to find a contractor that Metra would pay $50,000 for oversight services related to the Flyover. The oversight contract was ultimately abandoned, Clifford wrote.

In his statement Friday addressing Clifford's memo, Hugggins said he was "especially concerned with his claims regarding my efforts to resolve community concerns with minority business and employment participation in the Englewood Flyover Project. This project is taking place in an African-American community, and important leaders like Congressman Bobby Rush and Danny Davis were justifiably upset over the lack of community representation in Clifford's original construction plans. Everything I did to help resolve that controversy with members of Congress was done in concert with federal and state transportation officials and legal counsel."

Lawmakers at the hearing were upset with Metra's overall handling of the Clifford severance situation, but Metra officials questioned at the hearing said that only the board itself and the governor can dismiss board members.

However Gov. Pat Quinn's office said he does not have authority to replace the Metra board without cause. He could only do so based on an Office of the Executive Inspector General report and after a public hearing, Quinn spokeswoman Brooke Anderson said.

O'Halloran addressed the RTA at Gate's invitation on Wednesday, but shared far fewer details about the Clifford memo with the RTA than he and the Metra Board's attorney did the following day, before the House Mass Transit Committee.