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**FBI probing alleged call to union boss; Investigating Lisa Madigan endorsement**

By Dave McKinney

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SPRINGFIELD-FBI agents probing the Chicago police union's endorsement last December of Lisa Madigan for attorney general are investigating an alleged telephone call between her father, House Speaker Michael Madigan, and the union president shortly before she got the endorsement, sources told the Chicago Sun-Times.

The disclosure came Thursday as federal agents expanded their inquiry into how Madigan's daughter lined up important police endorsements. Leaders of the state Fraternal Order of Police acknowledged publicly for the first time that they have been contacted by a federal agent.

The Sun-Times first reported in early September that the Chicago FOP was being investigated. New details emerged Thursday.

At least one Chicago FOP board member was questioned recently about whether he had any knowledge of a long-distance conversation between Michael Madigan and former Chicago FOP President William Nolan weeks before the union endorsed Lisa Madigan over primary challenger John Schmidt.

The FBI was made aware last spring of the phone call, which allegedly occurred in November last year while Nolan was vacationing in Florida, a source familiar with the investigation said. The Chicago FOP endorsement came on Dec. 11 of last year.

At the time, some board members privately indicated they were lobbied heavily on Lisa Madigan's behalf and were led to believe that Michael Madigan would waylay any legislation sought by the union, including pension bills, if the union didn't board his daughter's bandwagon. Michael Madigan and Nolan deny any strong-arming.

"They just asked if I overheard the call, and I said no," said one Chicago FOP board member who was interviewed by the FBI several weeks ago and requested anonymity. "They were trying to hook something: Was pressure applied to the union."

Nolan, who now works for Cook County Sheriff Michael Sheahan--a Michael Madigan ally--declined comment.

A spokesman for Michael Madigan said he was unaware of a call between Madigan and Nolan before the endorsement and suggested the allegation was politically motivated.

"I have no knowledge that it occurred, and I know some of the people spreading that information, so I'd be real careful with it. You've got to check on what their motivations may be," spokesman Steve Brown said.

Brown said no telephone records had been subpoenaed from Michael Madigan and there were no efforts by the government to question him about the alleged phone call.

Federal investigators have a wide-open inquiry under way into whether Michael Madigan's office inappropriately applied pressure on a union's behalf in a dispute with Eastern Illinois University; whether he awarded bonuses to legislative staffers before they went to work on the campaigns of his daughter and other statewide candidates, and what role he may have played in some of his daughter's fund-raising efforts.

Meanwhile, the federal inquiry into the Chicago police union has extended to the state FOP's endorsement of Lisa Madigan over Republican candidate Joe Birkett in August. The state chapter's top lobbyist, Allen Bennett, confirmed that a federal agent had contacted group president Ted Street on Tuesday for an interview, which has not yet taken place.

"I sense there may be a little bit of pressure being applied to the feds to maybe, here at the last stage of a campaign, make a phone call or two. But it's not going anywhere because we didn't do anything wrong," Bennett told reporters in Springfield.

Lisa Madigan's campaign declined to comment about either development Thursday, but she and Chicago FOP President Mark Donahue also indicated the police endorsements were legitimate.

"I won the endorsement of the FOP fair and square," she said.

Birkett spokesman Steve Binder portrayed the disclosures as further evidence of wrongdoing by Michael Madigan's office.

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