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Final Edition

Jones tries to calm storm; Accuses reporters of fabricating stories about his family's cozy deals

By Dave McKinney and Chris Fusco

Sun-Times staff reporters

SPRINGFIELD -- Senate President Emil Jones on Thursday defended his stepson's financial deal with a utility company and accused reporters of fabricating stories about his family.

The South Side Democrat attempted to quash a political revolt from within his own party after the Chicago Sun-Times reported his stepson's computer firm was on the payroll of Commonwealth Edison's corporate parent at the same time Jones shielded ComEd from rate cuts.

"I don't have a conflict," Jones told reporters after a 45-minute, closed-door meeting with Senate Democrats.

Jones reiterated he had no knowledge that Synch-Solutions, owned by his stepson John Sterling, was on Exelon's information-technology payroll since 2004.

"No. 1, he doesn't check with me on what business he's doing business with, so I have no way of knowing what he's doing. He doesn't get involved in policy," Jones said.

The revelation about Sterling's deal followed a move by Jones to kill a rate rollback for ComEd customers two weeks ago by using a rare parliamentary step.

The story about Sterling comes after reports about how Jones' wife, a psychologist, boosted her state government salary by more than $70,000 through a 2005 promotion, and a son, Emil Jones III, landed a $57,360-a-year state commerce job last month despite lacking a college degree.

"You fabricate," Jones told reporters. "My wife was a professional. . . . They're paying her the same salary that her predecessor made."

"I'm proud of my son," Jones continued, referring to Sterling. "We sent him to college. He did well."

Some in Jones' caucus have questioned his credibility in the wake of his family profiting during his tenure as the state Senate's top Democrat. None have been willing to state such concerns publicly, fearing political retribution.

**JONES' DAUGHTER ADDED TO MIX**

In Thursday's editions, the Sun-Times and NBC5 disclosed Sterling's business relationships with both Exelon and the City Colleges of Chicago -- the latter of which awarded Sterling's firm a $45 million no-bid technology deal on April 12.

Besides Sterling, Jones' daughter, lobbyist Renee Rose, derives income linked to the City Colleges. She began lobbying members of the General Assembly on the college system's behalf during the last year and a half, Jones spokeswoman Cindy Davidsmeyer said.

Davidsmeyer did not know the nature of the lobbying work, including whether any of it involved securing state computer grants that could have benefitted her stepbrother.

Rose's work for the City Colleges was funneled to her through the law firm of Mayer, Brown, Rowe & Maw LLP, which she represents in Springfield. Mayer, Brown also lists Exelon as one of its clients, but both Davidsmeyer and an Exelon spokeswoman said Rose has done no lobbying work for the utility.

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