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**Madigan probe sought**

By Dave McKinney

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SPRINGFIELD--Attorney General Jim Ryan provided federal prosecutors Thursday with allegations that House Speaker Michael Madigan illegally awarded tax-funded bonuses to workers assigned to his daughter's statewide campaign and to other Democratic efforts.

An aide to the speaker brusquely denied any criminal wrongdoing related to the bonuses, which were first disclosed by the Chicago Sun-Times in stories in March and April.

In all, Madigan doled out at least $130,000 in bonuses last year to dozens of top aides, including $35,000 to chief of staff Timothy Mapes on top of his $129,468 salary.

The Sun-Times also reported that $97,000 in bonuses went to 25 of Madigan's staffers just months and, in some cases, days before they took leave from the state payroll to work on the attorney general campaign of Lisa Madigan and other Democratic candidates.

Chicago attorney Richard Means compiled and gave to Ryan, the GOP gubernatorial nominee, more research on the bonuses and on questionable tax-funded travel reimbursements for Madigan staffers assigned to political races.

On Thursday, in a one-sentence statement, Ryan indicated he would let federal prosecutors determine whether any state or federal laws were broken by the bonuses. An aide to the attorney general said he would reserve the right to pursue civil damages against Madigan, if warranted.

"The office of the Illinois attorney general, after consultation with the U.S. attorney, northern district of Illinois, has referred allegations involving the staff of House Speaker Michael Madigan to the U.S. attorney, central district of Illinois, for his review," the statement said.

It represents the second politically charged set of allegations that Ryan has put in the laps of federal prosecutors.

In late June, Ryan presented U.S. Attorney Patrick Fitzgerald with charges from Means that House Minority Leader Lee Daniels (R-Elmhurst) allowed his legislative staffers to be reimbursed improperly by the state for political work--a practice Daniels has denied knowledge of.

With this latest development, any political gain Ryan may get from jabbing at Madigan, chairman of the state Democratic Party, could cut both ways. Ryan's newly installed campaign manager, Carter Hendren, accepted $6,000 in bonuses last year while chief of staff for state Senate President James "Pate" Philip (R-Wood Dale).

Illinois law explicitly bars any payments to state employees "for work already performed and for which remuneration had already been made." But that statute dealing with bonuses has never been interpreted by the Illinois Supreme Court.

Madigan spokesman Steve Brown said that section of state law "is not applicable" to the payments authorized for the speaker's staff and pledged full cooperation with any possible federal review.

A spokesman for U.S. Attorney Jan Miller refused to comment on whether an investigation would begin or was under way.

Brown, who takes issue with the term "bonuses," said he was not sure whether Madigan, Mapes or someone else determined who would get additional payments, how substantial those payments would be, or what specifically would merit extra pay on top of regular salary.

Because of Ryan's gubernatorial ambitions, his move caused ripples in his campaign against Democrat Rod Blagojevich.

The North Side congressman assailed Ryan for having a "double standard" in quickly turning over allegations against the Democratic speaker to federal authorities. A Blagojevich aide said Ryan neglected to do the same thing when initially confronted years ago with corruption allegations against then-Secretary of State George Ryan, who is now Illinois' scandal-tainted Republican governor.

Blagojevich spokesman Doug Scofield could not say whether the congressman philosophically embraced Madigan's issuance of tax-funded bonuses to staff or whether Blagojevich would authorize similar payments to top aides should he become governor.

Jim Ryan could not be reached to answer those same questions.