

Madigan speaks out on indictment of key confidant and allies as defense lawyers in bribery case blame overzealous prosecutors

By [Jason Meisner](#) and [Ray Long](#) -- Chicago Tribune | Nov 19, 2020 at 10:20 AM

Illinois House Speaker Michael Madigan, the longest-serving House speaker in U.S. history, is also the state's Democratic Party chairman. More (E. Jason Wambsgans / Chicago Tribune)

Embattled House Speaker Michael Madigan responded Thursday to a new federal indictment alleging key allies orchestrated a bribery scheme with Commonwealth Edison to give contracts and do-nothing jobs to his associates in exchange for favorable action in Springfield.

The speaker released a statement saying that if anyone at ComEd had tried to bribe him, “it was



never made known to me.”

“If it had been known to me, it would have been profoundly unwelcome,” Madigan said in the statement. Madigan, the state’s most powerful politician and the longest-running House leader in the nation, has not been charged and has repeatedly denied any wrongdoing.

Also Thursday, lawyers for former ComEd lobbyist John Hooker became the latest to blame federal bribery charges on overzealous prosecutors bent on getting Madigan.

“We believe that Mr. Hooker will be found not guilty,” Hooker’s attorney, Michael Monico, said in a written statement. “It is unfortunate that in its zeal to prosecute another, the government has run roughshod over the life of a distinguished and inspiring role model like Mr. Hooker.”

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The Madigan statement came a day after Hooker and three others — Madigan confidant Michael McClain, former ComEd CEO Anne Prammagiore, and consultant Jay Doherty — [were charged in a 50-page indictment](#).

As he fights to keep his speakership, Madigan’s response represented his strongest denial to date, as he lashed out at detractors and stood behind making job recommendations over the years.

“If there was credible evidence that I had engaged in criminal misconduct, which I most certainly did not, I would be charged with a crime,” Madigan said. “But I have not, and with good reason because there is nothing wrong or illegal about making job recommendations, regardless of what people inside ComEd may have hoped to achieve from hiring some of the people who were recommended.”

The statement continued:

“Nonetheless, even though I am not alleged to have done anything in my official capacity as Speaker of the House to assist ComEd and have not been accused of any wrongdoing, this investigation has been used as a political weapon by those who seek to have me step down,” it read.

The indictment refers to Madigan only as Public Official A. And while none of the attorneys for the defendants have mentioned Madigan by name, either, their responses to the charges appear to be a coordinated effort to claim prosecutors are using their law-abiding clients as steppingstones to get to the powerful speaker.

Hours after the indictment was announced Wednesday, a lawyer for McClain, Patrick Cotter, issued a similar statement, detailing his client's impeccable resume and blasting the U.S. attorney's office for what he claimed was an improper use of bribery statutes.

Cotter said the charges appeared to be "driven by an obvious desire to find some way to criminally implicate a current elected official, who happens to be Mike McClain's longtime friend."

"In its zeal to find any evidence of criminal misconduct by that official, the government is attempting to rewrite the law on bribery and criminalize long-recognized legitimate, common, and normal lobbying activity into some new form of crime," Cotter wrote in the statement.

A spokesman for Pramaggiore, meanwhile, claimed she had "endured months of baseless innuendo and misinformation" and welcomed "a full and truthful accounting of the facts in this matter."

"She is confident a review will reaffirm her unwavering adherence to the highest ethical standards and finally put to rest the damaging speculation that any actions she took constitute illegal activity," the Pramaggiore statement read.

Doherty's attorneys said only that their client was innocent of the charges.

The defense strategy to question the motives of prosecutors was similar to one employed by lawyers for former Gov. Rod Blagojevich, who argued that the U.S. attorney's office improperly criminalized legal political horse-trading in its effort to take down a sitting governor.

Blagojevich was convicted of a wide array of corruption and given 14 years in prison. He was released in February after President Donald Trump commuted his sentence.

The indictment returned Wednesday alleged that beginning in 2011, the defendants "arranged for various associates" of Madigan — including his political allies and campaign workers — to "obtain jobs, contracts, and monetary payments" from ComEd even in instances where they did little or no actual work.

McClain and the other defendants also conspired to have ComEd hire a Madigan-favored law firm and lawyer, previously identified in public testimony as Victor Reyes of Reyes Kurson, and to accept into ComEd's internship program a certain amount of students who lived in Madigan's 13th Ward, according to the charges.

Pramaggiore and McClain also allegedly took steps to have an individual appointed to ComEd's board of directors at the request of Madigan and McClain, the indictment stated.

jmeisner@chicagotribune.com

rlong@chicagotribune.com