

Daley: Fire commissioner faces 'serious allegations'

Mayor refuses to give John Brooks vote of confidence

Comments

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By **FRAN SPIELMAN** City Hall Reporter

Mayor Daley conspicuously refused today to give embattled Fire Commissioner John Brooks a vote of confidence, dodging questions about Brooks' flippant response to an underling's sexual harassment allegation.

The Chicago Sun-Times reported last week that a payroll auditor in the Chicago Fire Department had accused Brooks of calling her repeatedly, coming on to her sexually and targeting her to be laid off from her city job when she refused his advances.

Anthony Boswell, head of Daley's Office of Compliance, was accused of quashing the investigation into the woman's claims, the Sun-Times reported.

Boswell is already serving a 30-day suspension for allegedly mishandling an intern's sexual harassment claim against a 911 center deputy.

Brooks acknowledged placing the calls to the woman but denied propositioning her or attempting to punish her.

"I have never sexually harassed any woman or man in my life," Brooks said. "I do not proposition women. I don't have to. Women usually proposition me. God has blessed me like that."

Brooks then went on vacation to get "out of the way" while a not-yet-designated outside agency conducts the delayed investigation.

Daley was asked twice today whether Brooks still enjoys his confidence. Twice, the mayor refused to say "yes."

"John Brooks stepped aside last week because of the serious allegations that were upon him," Daley said. "They'll be thoroughly investigated by someone they'll announce very shortly. These are serious allegations, so it's appropriate that he did step aside."

Asked again whether Brooks still enjoys his confidence, Daley said only, "Well, he stepped aside, and someone [First Deputy Robert Hoff] is acting presently now" in his place.

The mayor also dodged repeated questions on Brooks' boastful response to the woman's claims.

"I don't want to get into the comments of what he said and all that," Daley said. "That will be dealing with the seriousness of the allegations in regards to the complaint. That's what you have to look at."

Some female aldermen have branded Brooks' response "intemperate" and "insensitive." Asked whether he agreed, the mayor said, "Well, I don't know. You have to look at the seriousness of these allegations. That's why he stepped aside ... I'm not gonna respond to that. We have to look at the seriousness of the allegations."

On Friday, Brooks showed up at Chicago Fire Department headquarters in the South Loop just long enough to address his exempt staff, then left on his extended vacation.

Considering his response to the allegations against him — and Daley's refusal to give his embattled fire commissioner a vote of confidence — some at City Hall have questioned