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McDermott denies federal investigation

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HAMMOND | Representing Mayor Thomas McDermott Jr. and his family, attorney Kevin Smith on Friday denied federal authorities are investigating the family's role in the deal that landed a Cabela's sporting goods store in Hammond.

The allegations first surfaced Nov. 4 in a blog belonging to Maurice Eisenstein, a political science professor at Purdue University Calumet.

In the blog, Eisenstein reported two sources confirmed the McDermott family is being investigated by a grand jury for the Cabela's deal.

"We are in the process of determining all of the mayor's and his family's legal options regarding the defamatory remarks that are categorically false," Smith said. "It's our opinion these comments are made intentionally, with malice and no regard to the truth."

Smith said to his knowledge, neither the mayor, his family nor anyone else related to the Cabela's deal had received any subpoenas or requests for information from any grand jury or the U.S. attorney's office.

While Cabela's officials were not available for comment Friday, Smith said the same went for Cabela's.

"Cabela's is a family-owned corporation that deals 100 percent above board and responsibly," he said. "To even make innuendoes (otherwise) is irresponsible."

The U.S. attorney's office did not return calls Friday, but earlier in the week the office's spokeswoman, Mary Hatton, said the office could not comment.

Eisenstein said his sources had not indicated it was a federal grand jury that was hearing the case.

The source also did not address whether the grand jury was convened or at what stage, he said.

Eisenstein called the credibility of his source "impeccable."

Eisenstein said his blog did not say who was being investigated.

"Their threat to sue I find fatuous," he said. "The problem (with Cabela's) has been raised by many people, and he never answered any accusations about it."

McDermott has threatened to sue Eisenstein and others before, Eisenstein said.

"I'm sorry he's using this tactic to shut people down," Eisenstein said. "That's the way he operates."

[EXTRAS]