

A union divided

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She says he has frittered away thousands of dollars on Dutch vodka, margaritas, pricey lamb chops and the like. He says she has wasted money on satellite radio for her car and \$500,000 in meals.

The nasty food fight is between the Chicago Teachers Union's top two officials. They have turned on each other over allegations of misused funds in a nasty spat that has spilled into court.

The dueling charges come as critics contend the once financially fat labor organization has been forced to take out \$3 million in loans to stay afloat.

The union's executive board has accused Vice President **Ted Dallas** of inappropriately charging the CTU for more than \$6,200 in drinks -- ranging from Ketel One vodka to margaritas to pitchers of Miller Genuine Draft -- and dinners at such high-end hot spots as Gibson's Steakhouse, Coco Pazzo and Frontera Grill, according to documents obtained by the Chicago Sun-Times. The restaurant and bar tabs spanned a one-year period ending in February.

Dallas is also accused of signing a \$17,725 check to himself for sick days, authorizing a \$63,500 severance and sick-day payment to a still-employed worker and using CTU equipment to copy propaganda against Marilyn Stewart, CTU president.

Dallas said the allegations of misspent money are "fabrications."

"No one said those [drinks and dinners] were not proper," he said.

A union hearing was scheduled for 4:30 p.m. today to decide if Dallas should be stripped of his position and union membership. But Dallas fired back by suing the union, claiming Stewart was the big spender and that he and treasurer Linda Porter were being railroaded in their efforts to act as watchdogs on the union funds.

On Wednesday, Dallas asked a Cook County judge to stay the union hearing. A decision is expected today.

Dallas' suit says Porter estimates the union accrued \$500,000 in meal expenses over a year, in part because Stewart favored large lunch and dinner parties on the union's dime. The CTU paid for XM Satellite radio and OnStar for Stewart's car, the suit said.

The suit also says more than \$100,000 was wasted on T-shirts, hats and trinkets Stewart bought for the union through a no-bid contract with Go Promotions. The suit claims Go Promotions is owned by Rosemaria Genova, a union spokeswoman, and Nick Cannella, member services coordinator. Stewart didn't want to bid the contract because she likes Genova, the suit claims.

Genova said she is a sales consultant for Go Promotions but does not work with its CTU account. Public documents show Cannella is not the owner of Go Promotions.

Dallas said he was forced to file the suit, which seeks \$1 million in punitive damages for defamation, slander and other grievances, because "I'm being crucified."

"Stewart viewed herself as having complete authority to do as she pleased, which included publicly humiliating Dallas, stripping him of all of his authority, locking him out of the office, excluding him from meetings and

eventually seeking to expel him from the union and his elected position," Dallas' suit alleges.

The CTU issued a statement saying, "The president, other officers and the executive board have a solemn obligation and duty to protect the integrity of the union and its membership." The statement said Dallas made "false and misleading statements" and that the union will adhere to its internal process in dealing with Dallas' allegations and trial.

The charges come during a time the Chicago Teachers Union is facing what Stewart has called a "financial crisis." Past union president Deborah Lynch claims she left the union with \$5.4 million in reserves when Stewart defeated her in 2004. By last year, it had shrunk to \$188,000. Stewart claims past CTU leaders left her with a financial mess.

"We have our vice president and president destroying the union from the inside out," Lynch said.

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