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Jackson, Marks spar over accusations

*By TaMaryn Waters
Democrat Staff Writer*

Tallahassee Mayor John Marks momentarily lost his cool Wednesday after local businessman Erwin Jackson accused him of using his office to steer business toward AT&T.

Jackson, a sharp critic of city leadership and spending habits, presented emails and accused the mayor of using his staff to contact the Tallahassee Housing Authority to use AT&T for communications services.

Several emails from June 15, 2009, to June 15, 2009, were presented. One came from Alexandra Steele, an intern at that time in mayor's office, who sent an email dated June 25, 2009 to THA Executive Director Claudette Cromartie asking for information related to a possible AT&T program. Cromartie replied saying the agency had to follow its procurement policy and compare prices and services.

Once Jackson's three minutes for public speaking were up, Marks quickly said, "Are you saying this email came from my office?" Jackson replied, "Yes."

Marks posed the question twice more. Jackson said an email was sent from Steele. However Marks said no one by that name worked in his office.

"Normally I don't respond to you because everything you say is so way off base, so misleading, so false and so untrue. This is an example of things you have been doing," Marks rebutted. "I'm going to tell you tonight that what you said was absolutely false. There is nothing to it. And you are really absolutely wrong ... You may sit down. Call the next speaker."

Jackson attempted to respond but Marks cut him off. A brief exchange between the two prompted a Tallahassee Police officer to stand up and address Jackson if necessary.

Directly after the meeting, Marks told the Tallahassee Democrat he misspoke regarding Steele, who was an intern in 2009.

"I didn't recognize the name at first to be very honest with you," Marks said, who said she normally went by "Allie." "She reported directly to Carrie Blanchard (the mayor's former chief of staff) and didn't report directly to me."

He added, "At the time I thought he was referring to who was working for me at this point. Right now," Marks said, referring to his comments in the chambers.
