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By STEVEN K. PAULSON • Associated Press Writer DENVER — Colorado GOP gubernatorial candidate Dan Maes says he felt like former New York cop Frank Serpico when he helped investigate an alleged gambling ring as a police officer in Kansas in the 1980s, only to have his comrades turn against him. Now he's stunned that it's being used against him by political opponents. In an interview with The Associated Press, Maes offered his version of his murky role with the police department and a secret law enforcement probe in Liberal, Kan., in what, 25 years later, has become a flash point in the Colorado governor's race.

Maes told the AP that the events began in 1985 when he discovered evidence of what he believed was a gambling ring at the home of his then-girlfriend's parents. He informed his superiors in the police department, only to have the claims dismissed as trivial at the time, he said. But a month later, Maes recalled, a police captain ordered him to a secret meeting with two Kansas Bureau of Investigation agents at a motel to tell them about the alleged gambling ring. Maes told the AP he was "curious and very scared" when he knocked on the motel door and was ordered to "take off your gun, take off your tie, and you get comfortable" while he talked to the KBI agents. "In my mind, all I can see is Serpico. Remember Serpico? He walks up to a door, knocks, and a gun gets stuck in his face. That did not happen to me, but that's what's going through my mind," he said. Maes said he told them everything they wanted to know, and they asked him to keep them informed about what was going on inside his girlfriend's house. A month later, Maes said he was shocked when then-police chief Rick Kistner called him into his office and told him he was being fired for continuing to associate with possible criminals.

"My best recollection was, I was being dismissed because I was associating with people of bad character, and that reflected poorly on the Liberal Police Department," he said.

American Constitution Party gubernatorial candidate Tom Tancredo has questioned Maes' version of events and urged him to release his personnel file. Maes said he has requested copies of that file and will make them public when he receives them.

Both men are running against Democrat John Hickenlooper in the November election.

Bob Blecha, director of the Kansas Bureau of Investigation, has said there is no record of Maes working for the bureau as an undercover agent. He said there was an investigation of bookmaking in Liberal at the time but "it was unsuccessful." Blecha refused to provide details because there was no prosecution.

Kistner, who is retired and now lives in Key Largo, Fla., said he doesn't remember Maes or any bookmaking operation.

Character has become a major issue in the race. Tancredo was accused of getting on the ballot illegally after switching from the GOP, but a Denver District Court judge ruled Tuesday it was legal.

Before the primary, Maes paid a \$17,500 fine for improperly paying himself \$40,000 from campaign funds for mileage reimbursements. That in part prompted Tancredo to demand he leave the race as a matter of integrity. Maes refused.

Maes also raised eyebrows when he said a Denver bike-sharing program could threaten residents' "personal freedoms" because it is part of an attempt to control U.S. cities. Maes said that an international environmental group that promotes Denver's B-Cycle program is part of a "greater strategy to rein in American cities under a United Nations treaty."

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