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APA seat in dispute

GOP senator maintains nomination is dead, but Democrats cite study

By BRIAN NEARING, Staff writer

ALBANY -- A state lawmaker from the Adirondacks said Thursday the nomination of prominent Essex County boat builder Peter Hornbeck for a seat on the Adirondack Park Agency won't pass the Senate. But a Senate spokesman said the panel was merely taking a closer look at the nominee.

The Hornbeck nomination has become a political football over conflicting philosophies of development and protection in the 6-million-acre Adirondack Park.

Pro-development forces believe Hornbeck, a member of a conservation group that recently sued the APA over the status of a wilderness lake, is unfit to serve on the agency, which controls development rules in the park. Conservation groups have lined up behind Hornbeck.

On Thursday, Sen. Betty Little, R-Queensbury, said the Senate would not approve Hornbeck, who was nominated for the APA by Gov. David Paterson, a Democrat. Little's statement said Hornbeck's nomination lacks the votes to clear the Senate Finance Committee.

But a spokesman for committee chairman Sen. Carl Kruger said the panel had made no decisions. "Some members have asked for a more in-depth review of the nominee, and that has been turned over to committee staffers to perform," spokesman Jason Koppel said.

Hornbeck said Little was "painting me with an 'environmentalist' brush, but I am also in the business community. I can look at both points of view. The economy of the Adirondacks is based on the environment." Hornbeck said he employs five people in Olmsteadville, where he manufactures lightweight, non-motorized boats that are prized by paddlers.

A member of the Minerva Town Planning Board, Hornbeck has support from the Minerva Town Board, said John Sheehan, a spokesman for the Adirondack Council, a group that lobbies to protect wilderness. Three current APA commissioners -- Chairman Curt Stiles as well as Cecil Wray and Dick Booth -- served as directors of the Adirondack Council.

"It is interesting that Hornbeck opponents are ignoring the advice of the town that knows him best," said Sheehan, who called Little's announcement "premature."

The Senate Environmental Conservation Committee voted along party lines to recommend Hornbeck for a four-year term to the seat now held by Lake Placid hotel owner Arthur Lussi, whose term expired in June. Lussi had been appointed by Gov. George Pataki, a Republican. Little wants Lussi to be reappointed.

Hornbeck's daughter is a Times Union staff writer.

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