

WNBZ
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Support for Hornbeck appointment to APA board waning

The appointment of Minerva boat builder Peter Hornbeck to the Adirondack Park Agency Board of Commissioners is on life support in the Senate today as it appears the Governor's nod lacks the necessary votes to move forward.

State Senator Betty Little and several of her GOP counterparts have argued that because Hornbeck sits on the board of directors for Protect the Adirondacks – an environmental group currently suing the APA – his appointment as a commissioner would represent a conflict of interest.

Little said Thursday her argument appears to have resonated with fellow senators from both parties.

“I was informed yesterday that the Finance Committee informed the Governor that they do not have the votes to move his nomination out of finance,” Little said. “Because of that, I believe the nomination will not go forward.”

Protect is suing the APA for its decision last fall not to classify the waters of Lows Lake as Wilderness.

Last week, the appointment was approved in the Senate Environmental Conservation Committee and was slated to reach the Finance Committee in the coming months.

Little says she's been told that support for the gubernatorial nomination is waning and there simply aren't enough votes in support of Hornbeck's selection to survive the Finance Committee.

Jason Koppel is chief of staff to Senate Finance Committee Chairman Carl Kruger. He says Governor David Paterson's choice of Hornbeck is undergoing an in-depth review following the conflict of interest claims.

“Instead of just taking it, looking at the resume and putting him on, some of the members asked for a more in-depth review,” Koppel said. “And that's what we are doing.”

Koppel stressed the appointment is still under review and not officially defeated. He also noted that finance has hundreds of appointments on its docket and the approval process is backlogged several months.

On Tuesday, finance approved 24 appointments, some dating back as far as April 2009.

Little and some local governments have blasted the Governor's choice, claiming it unfairly weights the board of commissioners toward conservationism.

“Both Democrats and Republicans throughout the district felt there was a conflict in Mr. Hornbeck’s appointment since he on the board of directors of Protect, who in January sued the APA,” Little said. “Before that, the group made it widely known that they opposed the project in Tupper Lake, which will be going before the APA in the next few months.”

Three current APA commissioners have ties to the Adirondack Council.

Supporters counter Hornbeck’s selection makes sense because he represents the right balance of business and environmentalism.

Little said she’s asking that current APA Commissioner Art Lussi, whose four-year term expired last summer, be reappointed to the seat.

“As I’ve said before, Art Lussi has done a good job in the one term he has served as an APA commissioner and a second term is something I’m confident many people would support,” Little said.

Until a replacement is approved, Lussi will remain on the APA board by default.

-Jon Alexander, 3-5-10