

WNBZ
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Valesky, Sheehan go public with Hornbeck battle

The battle to get Minerva boat-builder Peter Hornbeck seated on the Adirondack Park Agency Board of Commissioners has gone public in central New York as Democratic state Senator David Valesky and Adirondack Council spokesman John Sheehan are now trading jabs in the press.

On Monday, Sheehan blasted Valesky in his own district's largest newspaper – the Syracuse Post-Standard – for his role in stalling Hornbeck's appointment.

Sheehan noted that the Democrat's lack of support for Hornbeck's nomination is at-least partially the result of the complaints of a member of the minority opposition party, Republican Senator Betty Little.

“What is New York State Sen. David Valesky thinking? At the request of a minority-party senator who doesn't even live in the Adirondack Park, he is opposing the governor's latest nominee to the Adirondack Park Agency,” Sheehan writes.

And he didn't hesitate to take a shot at Little, either.

“She doesn't like Hornbeck because he is an environmentalist,” Sheehan said. “She prefers the resort owner, whom Hornbeck would replace on the land-use agency's board of commissioners.”

Hornbeck is Governor David Paterson's choice to replace APA Commissioner Art Lussi.

But not to be outdone on his home turf, Valesky fired back Wednesday, claiming Sheehan is ignoring the most pertinent facts surrounding the appointment.

“The duty of the Adirondack Park Agency is to protect the natural resources of the Adirondack Park while also promoting economic stability and job creation in the region,” Valesky said. “Yet, Mr. Hornbeck is part of a group that filed a lawsuit against the APA with the intention of blocking development. This raises serious questions about the appropriateness of the nomination and about Mr. Hornbeck's ability to be objective.”

Hornbeck's involvement with Protect the Adirondacks, a group currently suing the APA for not classifying the waters of Lows Lake as Wilderness, has worried several Senators on both sides of the aisle.

Little argues that this alone raises legitimate questions about Hornbeck's objectivity.

Valesky's upstate Democratic peer, Darrell Aubertine, has also expressed similar conflict of interest concerns regarding Hornbeck's environmental record.

The nomination is currently stalled in the Senate Finance Committee, where it must pass before coming to the floor for an up or down vote; Valesky serves on the finance committee. Because of a slim two-vote Democratic majority on finance, Valesky's affirmative vote is needed to move the nomination to the floor.

But Sheehan reminded the Senator of the state's interest in the Adirondacks.

"The Adirondack Park belongs to everyone in New York, not just the senator who lives closest to it," he said.

But for Valesky, stocking the APA board with environmentalists shouldn't be the primary goal.

"I will continue to work to make sure the APA is a balanced board whose members are objective, fair and pragmatic in the interests of all of the residents of and visitors to the Adirondack Park," he said.

Even if the appointment survives finance, with only a 32 to 30 majority, Democrats would need the support of every member of their conference for its approval.

-Jon Alexander, 4-15-10