



NIAGARA COUNTY
PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE

MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: CHRISTIAN W. PECK
PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER
TEL: (716) 439-7241
FAX: (716) 439-7058

April 29, 2010

CERETTO CALLS FOR INVESTIGATION INTO CUSACK SWEETHEART DEAL SEEKS IG PROBE OF WHY NYPA TRUSTEE GIVEN HIGH-DOLLAR NYPA JOB

LOCKPORT—Reacting to news that former New York Power Authority Trustee Elise Cusack was given a high-paying job at the Power Authority just days after departing the same body's board of trustees, a Niagara County legislator announced he would ask fellow lawmakers to call for an investigation into the matter.

Legislator John D. Ceretto, R-Lewiston, whose district includes the Power Authority's Niagara Power Project, said he was astonished that the Power Authority would hire a trustee just one month after she resigned from the board of trustees. Cusack's new gig, as a part-time "community liaison," will pay her \$77,500 per year—a questionable hire that Ceretto wants the New York State Office of Inspector General to investigate.

Cusack, a former Erie County legislator, was noted for her slavish loyalty to Power Authority CEO Richie Kessel and regularly voting in favor of downstate and Albany interests at the Authority, including supporting the Authority's \$550 million "sweep" of overpayments by Western New York utility customers.

"Elise Cusack was supposed to promote the interests of Western New Yorkers when she was a Power Authority trustee," Ceretto said on introducing a resolution that would express the county's demands that the IG investigate Cusack's curious appointment. "We now know the only Western New Yorker who benefited from her time as trustee was Elise Cusack."

Ceretto also noted that Cusack's attendance at board of trustees meetings had been less than stellar, seeing her attend just two out of 19 board meetings in 2007.

"How do you only attend two out of 19 meetings as a trustee, and then, without any kind of job search, be judged the most qualified person for a job at the same employer?" Ceretto demanded. "If most of us missed 89 percent of our scheduled work, we wouldn't be in line for a \$77,000 promotion."

Ceretto pointed to the fact that the Power Authority neither advertised for the community liaison post nor solicited résumés before awarding the job to Cusack.

"Serving as a trustee of an agency, only to be hired into a high-paying job at the same agency—a job that was created when your term expired, and never was needed before that, and for which that agency never advertised for or sought résumés to ensure it got the best candidate? I think they call that an 'appearance of impropriety,'" Ceretto said. "This smells bad. Local media, including the [Buffalo News](#), have said it smells bad."

In media coverage of the matter, Kessel was quoted as saying, "I am very comfortable with this...I suggested to her that maybe she'd want to come work for us."

Ceretto said he expects a prompt response to the request from the Inspector General, noting that the IG's only real responsibility would be to determine if Cusack's actions broke agency rules or state laws.

The Power Authority's Code of Conduct states that "New York Power Authority employees, officers and trustees shall perform their duties with integrity and not use or attempt to use their official position to secure unwarranted privileges for themselves, their relatives or any other party, including contracts and employment with NYPA." Ceretto said the Code's language is fairly straightforward.

"I'm asking the IG to complete his investigation and issue a report by July 1," Ceretto said. "There is no reason to drag out what looks like a simple investigation to protect Elise Cusack and her political masters."

The Lewiston lawmaker said he hopes that a fair and impartial investigation is conducted that gets to the bottom of whether rules were broken and a *quid pro quo* occurred rewarding Cusack for her past votes.

"If what was done here was right, this will give Elise Cusack and Richie Kessel an opportunity to clear their names," Ceretto said. "If what was done here wasn't right, it will give New York's taxpayers some answers and hopefully restore the integrity of what is, the last time I checked, still a public authority accountable to the taxpayers."

###