

Written by Administrator
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HARRISBURG - When it comes to filling paid seats on the board that regulates Pennsylvania casinos, one party's "crony" is another party's "valuable contributor."

That was the case on Friday as both

parties' legislative leaders named people to the state Gaming Control Board who are better known for their past roles in the legislature.

When state House Minority Leader Frank Dermody (D., Allegheny) selected former House Speaker Keith McCall (D., Carbon) to serve on the board, the Republican House majority opened fire.

"This is the type of perceived cronyism that sets the stage for a lack of trust in Harrisburg," said Steve Miskin, spokesman for the House GOP caucus.

Meanwhile, Senate President Pro Tempore Joe Scarnati (R., Jefferson) was naming his former top aide, Tony Moscato, to the board.

Each of the four legislative caucus leaders make one appointment to the seven-member board. The governor selects the remaining three. The pay is good: board members receive an annual salary of \$145,000.

The board, formed under the 2004 law legalizing casino gambling, is charged with awarding casino licenses and ensuring that operators follow state laws and regulations.

Scarnati and Dermody defended their choices on Friday.

"Tony [Moscato] has a unique perspective because he was an elected official," said Drew Crompton, Scarnati's chief of staff. Moscato served for 16 years as a Cameron County commissioner before becoming special assistant to Scarnati for the last two years, when

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Scarnati served as lieutenant governor.

Dermody said McCall, the former House speaker, was familiar with issues the board has faced and understood the importance of the gaming industry in delivering tax relief and providing jobs.

"He earned a reputation for the highest integrity during his years in the legislature, and he will be a valuable contributor to the work of the seven-member board," Dermody said in a statement.

McCall, who retired in November after 28 years in the House, fills the seat that had been held by Jeffrey Coy - a Democrat who had also served in the House.

The House GOP began gearing up its response to McCall's appointment to the gaming board even before it became official. One lawmaker drafted a bill - due for consideration in a House committee next Tuesday - that would bar former legislators from serving on the gaming board within a year of leaving elective office.

The bill also would prevent executive-level staff from being appointed during that same time - which would have made it impossible for Scarnati to appoint Moscato.

If the bill becomes law, however, it won't be applied retroactively.

Its sponsor, State Rep. Rob Kauffman (R., Franklin) said the gaming board should be run by highly qualified regulators and was not meant to be a place for former lawmakers to "live large in retirement."

Democrat and Republican nominated to Pa. casino oversight board - Philadelphia Inquirer

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Contact staff writer Amy Worden at 717-783-2584 or aworden@phillynews.com .

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