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Pataki leaving legacy of posts

New Court of Appeals judge among 60 appointments approved by state Senate

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ALBANY -- Gov. George Pataki Friday won jobs for 60 appointees from the Republican-led Senate Friday, including Eugene F. Pigott Jr., the fifth Pataki judge on the seven-member Court of Appeals.

Many of the appointments, including Pigott's, will extend for years even though Pataki, a Republican, is leaving in December after not seeking re-election.

Pigott, 59, from western New York, fills the post of George Bundy Smith, an appointee of former Democratic Gov. Mario Cuomo. Smith, the court's only black jurist, sought to stay even though his appointment expired this week and he will reach the mandatory retirement age of 70 next year.

Pigott's term runs through 2016. He'll make \$151,200 a year.

While acknowledging Pigott has excellent qualifications, some Senate Democrats argued for racial diversity on the court.

"The administration of justice has to include all the talented people around the state who happen to be women, half the state's population, happen to be African-American, 16 percent of the state's population," said Senate Minority Leader David Paterson, D-Harlem.

Among the political appointments was that of Michael J. Relyea to a \$136,000-per-year post directing the New York Office of Science, Technology & Academic Research, which gives millions of dollars in grants to tech companies. Relyea is a former Pataki official who has recently been with Mercury Public Affairs, a lobbying group of other former Pataki administration officials.

Relyea, who formerly worked at NYSTAR and in Pataki's appointments office, said his term is uncertain. He will serve at the pleasure of the governor.

Democrats also criticized appointments to the Workers' Compensation Board. They included Ellen O. Paprocki, whose father, John F. O'Mara, was Pataki's Public Service Commission chairman before becoming a lobbyist. Paprocki's term runs through 2011. It pays \$90,800 annually.

Most of the other appointments were unpaid, including one until mid-2013 to the Long Island State Park, Recreation & Historic Preservation Commission for Pataki's former director of communications, Lisa Dewald Stoll.

Sen. Liz Krueger, D-Manhattan, said she voted against the appointments because the governor sprang the list on the Senate even though he knew weeks ago it was returning for the one-day session.

"I'm the governor of the State of New York and, God willing, I'll be governor until December 31," Pataki said in response to a reporter's question about charges of midnight appointments.

The Senate held off on confirming John J. Spano, brother of Sen. Nick Spano, R-Yonkers, as commissioner of the Office of General Services, which pays \$136,000; he'll remain as acting commissioner. James M. Odato can be reached at 454-5083 or by e-mail at jodato@timesunion.com.

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