

Sampson: Unpressured And 'Comfortable' With Chief Judge-To-Be

February 10, 2009

Sen. [John Sampson](#), chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, insists the sudden scheduling of a confirmation hearing for Chief Judge nominee, Jonathan Lippman, has nothing to do with a rather explosive story out today [by the Village Voice's Wayne Barrett](#).

The crux of Barrett's piece, which will grace the Voice's cover tomorrow but was rushed onto the Web a day early to beat what appears to be the hastily-called hearing at 9 a.m. tomorrow in Albany, is [the influence Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver has had](#) in advancing the career of Lippman, who is the speaker's childhood friend.

Sampson, who called in from his LOB office, confirmed he has been "under pressure" to move Lippman, although he said neither Gov. David Paterson, Silver, nor Senate Majority Leader Malcolm Smith have been pushing him to move.

He said the "legal community" at large has been upset with his refusal to immediately schedule a hearing on Lippman after Paterson [formally announced his nomination](#) on Jan. 13.

The Brooklyn Democrat said he was initially inclined to "block" Lippman's confirmation, adding: "When the governor nominated Judge Lippman to be the next chief judge, make no bones about it, I was pissed off."

"I was pissed off not at Judge Lippman, but pissed off at the process," Sampson continued. "...I did my homework before I moved ahead with this nomination. Everybody was asking me when I was going to do Lippman, and I told them I would do it when the time was right. When the questions I had and the public had were resolved."

Sampson was among a rather vocal group (which included Paterson himself) of lawmakers who criticized the judicial nomination process and felt that the choices presented to the governor lacked diversity. The senator held a series of hearings on this topic, and he said he plans to keep pushing the issue.

As for Lippman, Sampson said the judge came to see him in Brooklyn last Friday and then came to Albany yesterday for a closed-door grilling by the Senate Democrats. The topic of Silver and his relationship to Lippman did indeed come up.

"He was on the hot seat," Sampson said. "He was asked everything under the sun. No holds barred. Our members in our conference, we do not hold our tongues or our lips. I'm comfortable. I'm very comfortable to move this nomination."

"I don't think (Barrett's) article could have been more critical than I was," the senator continued, adding that while he has a copy of the Voice story, he has not yet read it. "I've evolved on Lippman."

"My concerns have been alleviated with respect to the hijacking of this process and the conspiracy theory as to whether Shelly was involved with pushing him through. I am comfortable after going through everything that with respect to this, it did not take place, and in the future, we are going to make sure it never takes place."

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By Elizabeth Benjamin on February 10, 2009 2:01 PM | [Comments \(2\)](#)

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Cincinnatus

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It's great to see that a new era of transparency and accountability has been ushered into Albany with the ascendance to majority status of the Senate Democrats.