

Bellone selects personnel director

Past appointee says he was 'evicted' Friday

BY RICK BRAND
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Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone after the close of business Friday announced the appointment of Jo-Anne Taormina as county personnel officer. The veteran head of the office, Alan Schneider, said he was "evicted" from his office by Bellone aides.

In a statement at 5:08 p.m., Bellone said he was assigning Barry Paul, Suffolk director of performance management, to work with Taormina on the transition.

Bellone said former Democratic Rep. Gary Ackerman, a Nassau Civil Service commissioner, had agreed to serve in an advisory capacity to reshape

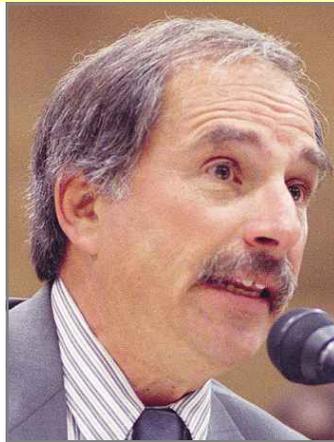
the department.

Bellone aides did not return calls for comment.

Schneider said Bellone's top deputy, Dennis Cohen, earlier Friday had asked him to resign. Schneider said Cohen and Bellone aides Lisa Black and Tom Vaughn arrived at his office about 3 p.m. and told him to pack his belongings. Schneider's wife and son came to pick him up.

"I felt I was treated like a criminal who was removed for cause," said Schneider, who said he was ordered to give up his cellphone, iPad, office and car keys, and that county employees came to change the locks.

Schneider would not say whether he would fight his removal. But he said state Civil Service law does not allow the executive to install an interim appointee, and that he can only be replaced by someone confirmed by the county legislature.



Alan Schneider

The personnel officer oversees 47,500 civil service appointments in 278 towns and villages as well as fire and library districts throughout Suffolk County.

The Civil Service job, like a handful of other sensitive county posts, carries a term to give the office chief indepen-

dence to carry out state rules and create a competitive merit system for filling government jobs. Schneider's six-year term expired Feb. 13.

In a news release, Bellone said Taormina, a former North Hempstead Town chief of staff, was "deemed qualified for the position with technical guidance provided by the [state] Department of Civil Service.

In North Hempstead, Taormina oversaw 400 workers, created the first employee handbook and also served as commissioner of finance and human resources.

"The department of Civil Service should be at the heart of efforts to bring in the best talent and to support and develop the county's most valuable asset — its workforce," Bellone said in the prepared statement, in which he also thanked Schneider "for his nearly four decades of service."

Bellone told Schneider earlier this month he would not be

reappointed.

In response, Suffolk's 10 town supervisors urged Schneider's reappointment to a new term. They cited his "unmatched understanding of the complexities of the job" and "a well-earned reputation as a professional."

Bellone in his release said Taormina and Paul over the next two months will conduct a "top to bottom review" of the Civil Service department to "incorporate new ideas and innovations."

Babylon Town Supervisor Richard Schaffer, head of the supervisor's association, said, "This is no way to treat a 36-year employee who has done nothing wrong."

Schaffer, who also serves as Suffolk Democratic chairman and has clashed frequently with Bellone, said: "You don't storm the office, throw someone out and change the locks. He hasn't done anything to warrant it."

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