

LONG ISLAND POLITICS/SPIN CYCLE

# John Kennedy won't approve salary payments for Civil Service nominee

By Rick Brand

rick.brand@newsday.com @newsdaybrand

Updated February 20, 2019 7:14 PM

Suffolk County Comptroller John M. Kennedy Jr., a Republican, said Wednesday he will not approve salary payments to Jo-Anne Taormina, County Executive Steve Bellone's choice for the county's top civil service job, unless she is confirmed by the county Legislature.

"I'm not questioning his authority to hire," said Kennedy, a contender to run against Bellone in November. "But he cannot act alone."



Suffolk Comptroller John M. Kennedy Jr. won't allow salary payments to Jo-Anne Taormina, the nominee for county personnel director, unless she is confirmed. Photo Credit: Newsday/Steve Pfof

Kennedy said Section 15b of state Civil Service Law states the county executive nominates the personnel officer, but lawmakers must vote to confirm.

Bellone swore in Taormina on Tuesday to the \$163,699-a-year job. Jason Elan, Bellone's spokesman, said Taormina would be put on the payroll immediately, while acknowledging she would have to go through the confirmation process.

On Wednesday, Elan accused Kennedy of using his office "as a weapon to block reform and protect political insiders who are stalwart defenders of a broken system."

Some critics said Bellone acted illegally in removing Alan Schneider from the civil service post days after his term ran out last week. They said Schneider should remain as a holdover to protect the office's independence until a successor is confirmed.

But County Attorney Dennis Brown said in a statement that state and county law say, "once Alan's term expired, the office became vacant for the purposes of naming a successor."

Bellone "was authorized to appoint a qualified successor, who serves pending legislative approval," Brown said.