

Appointments controversy cools in state Senate

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CHARLESTON, W.Va. — The acrimony between Senate Republicans and Democrats over gubernatorial appointments eased Thursday after reaching a boiling point the previous day.

The Senate delayed until Saturday a floor vote on the list of appointments that excluded six of Gov. Tomblin's recommendations. Both sides agreed that would allow time to possibly compromise on the appointments.

The controversy erupted Wednesday after the Senate Confirmations Committee struck the names from a list of 454 individual to various boards and commissions. Three of the six are key Democratic loyalists—AFL-CIO President Kenny Perdue, Communications Workers of America representative Elaine Harris and state Democratic Party Chair Belinda Biafore.

Sen. Minority Leader Jeff Kessler (D-Marshall), a member of the Confirmations Committee, was livid over the move, accusing Republican leaders of punishing political opponents. Kessler expanded on his complaints during an appearance on MetroNews "Talkline."

"It's beneath the dignity of the Senate to play politics with people's lives," said Kessler. "You try to attract good people and put them on boards that are dedicated. You don't play politics with them and say, 'Because you are my opponent, I'm going to punish you.'"

Perdue believed action against him was purely in response to his outspoken criticism of the right-to-work and prevailing wage legislation from earlier in the session.

"Prevailing wage put a lot of food on my table," he said. "So for me to proudly stand up and protest, what else did they expect me to do? It's obvious they know how to protest and their protest was to take me off the Workforce Investment Board."

Senate President Bill Cole, who also appeared on "Talkline" Thursday, said there was no politically motivated retaliation.

"Six people out of 454, and we pushed back on six? I don't understand where all of the furor is coming from," said Cole. "I would remind Sen. Kessler that he's in the minority now. We were fully in our rights to withhold on six, frankly we were within our rights to withhold on 454 if we wanted to."

Cole, the GOP candidate for governor, wouldn't take the bait on a partisan fight. He deferred to more pressing issues with the only days left in the session.

"You know I've never been a big partisan hack and I'm not going to start now, no matter if Jeff (Kessler) wants to paint me into some Republican box," said Cole. "I advance legislation in the Senate whether it's Democrat or Republican. If it's a good idea for West Virginia then I'm all about it."