

Maine ethics watchdog looking at links between offshore firm, casino campaign

Written by Administrator

Thursday, 30 March 2017 08:58 -

Good morning from Augusta, where a remarkable hearing yesterday that illuminated an offshore firm's influence on the 2017 ballot initiative for a new casino in York County prompted Maine's ethics watchdog to reach out to the campaign bankrolling the bid about its finances.

That scrutiny from the Maine Ethics Commission came on a bad day for the proposal linked to U.S. Virgin Islands developer Shawn Scott, which had a public hearing [before the Legislature's Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee](#) that led Senate Majority Leader Garrett Mason, R-Lisbon Falls, to say the casino campaign placed "major corruption issues in front of us."

It also comes just two months after a failed 2016 casino campaign also linked to Scott [agreed to pay Massachusetts regulators \\$125,000](#) for disguising \$1.6 million in contributions for a firm associated with Scott's offshore firm, Bridge Capital.

The Maine campaign has been run so far through Horseracing Jobs Fairness, a ballot question committee funded by \$4.2 million as of January, all of which came Scott's sister, Lisa Scott of Miami, according to filings with the state.

On Wednesday, the only person to speak in favor of the proposal was Portland lobbyist Dan Riley, who told the committee that he had been hired hours earlier via email to represent Bridge Capital, which is based in the U.S. territory of the Northern Mariana Islands, so he wasn't able to answer many questions.

But he said that he had "never spoken" to Lisa Scott or anyone from the political committee that she has led. However, he said he met once with Shawn Scott earlier this year because Riley's law firm, Norman, Hanson and DeTroy, has been representing Bridge Capital on real estate matters as it considers buying a potential casino site in southern Maine.

Later on Wednesday, Jonathan Wayne, executive director of the Maine Ethics Commission, said he reached out to the ballot question committee after seeing media reports indicating

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“mention of another organization that might have some financial activity” around the effort.

This is an initial, proactive step and any investigation would have to be authorized by commissioners. Making political contributions in the name of another is [illegal under state law](#) .

Scott, who bought the Bangor Raceway, funded a 2003 campaign to allow slots there and sold the rights to what became Hollywood Casino for \$51 million, controls Bridge Capital along with CEO John Baldwin. A casino owned by the company was [seized in 2015 by the Laotian government](#) and sold over alleged corruption and tax evasion that the company has denied.

Lawmakers savaged Riley over that on Wednesday. Gov. Paul LePage has said [the effort is motivated by “greed.”](#)

The ethics scrutiny is another public relations battle.

[Here's your soundtrack](#)

— *Michael Shepherd*

Large-scale mining could be on the path to passage

Rules to allow large-scale metallic mineral mining in Maine have been under debate for years. Passage of rules [developed by the Department of Environmental Protection](#) and [recommended by the citizen-led Board of Environmental Protection](#)

have

[failed twice in recent years](#)

when they

[ran into roadblocks in the Legislature](#)

Democrats and environmental groups opposed the proposed rules on the grounds (ha!) that they weren't stringent enough to protect the environment and didn't include enough financial protections to ensure that environmental damage will be cleaned up when the mining is finished.

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The issue is [under debate again this year](#) with several related bills, including [another attempt by the department](#) to have rules approves, multiple [measures to ban mining](#) and [efforts to find bipartisan buy-in for enough protections to allow mining](#)

.

According to Sen. Tom Saviello, R-Wilton, co-chairman of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee, which is the scene of the mining debate this year, the gap between the nays and yeas is narrowing. Saviello's bill, [LD 580](#), was killed unanimously by the committee on Wednesday to make way for [a similar bill](#) proposed by Sen. Brownie Carson, D-Harpswell, who is the former leader of the Natural Resources Council of Maine.

According to Saviello, Carson's bill addresses many of the friction points of the past and there appears to be consensus brewing. Carson could not be reached in time for the Daily Brief.

"I think we're as close as we've ever been to pulling this off," said Saviello on Wednesday. "I want to give Sen. Carson and the environmental community credit. For the first time they've articulated much better what their requirements are to make this happen."

Saviello said Carson's bill and some of the others will be brought up for a work session on Monday at which officials from the NRCM and department are expected. It could still take some time to hammer out an agreement, if there's one there.

[Here's a heavy metal soundtrack](#) for you. Or, [there's this one](#) which I'm obliged to include at my editor's "suggestion." —

Christopher Cousins

Quick hits

- **LePage criticized Secretary of State Matt Dunlap and legislators for not acting quickly enough to address Real ID concerns for veterans. But there is a bill sitting on his**

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desk. During an interview this morning [on WGAN](#), the governor expressed frustration that military veterans from Maine could not access medical services in other states because [Maine licenses do not conform to federal Real ID standards](#). He cited the infirmary at Portsmouth Naval Shipyard as one example of an out-of-state health center to which Maine veterans are denied access because of the state law that keeps Real ID information off driver's licenses. But

[LD 213](#)

, an emergency bill to have the state buy passports for affected veterans, sponsored by Assistant Democratic House Leader Jared Golden, a Marine Corps veteran from Lewiston, passed the House on March 14 and the Senate on March 21, meaning it only needs LePage's signature to become law. Golden said this morning he was drafting a personal note to LePage.

"For the last eight days an emergency bill passed unanimously in the Senate and 110-8 in the House that would solve this problem has been sitting on the governor's desk," said Golden in a written statement. "I'm glad the governor seems to recognize the importance of making sure that nothing stands between a veteran and his or her health care and I hope that his pen matches his words and that he signs LD 213 into law." — *Robert Long and Christopher Cousins*

- **LePage's nominee to lead the Maine Department of Education received a bipartisan endorsement.**

Robert G. Hasson Jr., whom [LePage nominated for the post in February](#), had his interview with the Legislature's Education Committee on Wednesday and came out of it with a unanimous endorsement. The department has been without a permanent commissioner since 2014 when Jim Rier left the position for medical reasons. After

[Democrats indicated they would challenge LePage's nomination of former Husson University William Beardsley](#)

, the governor refused to nominate a permanent replacement — and for a brief time [insisted he would personally act as de facto commissioner](#)

. Since then, he has

[cycled high-level department employees through the position for interim stints](#)

. Hasson, a former teacher, principal and superintendent, next faces confirmation by the full Senate. Judging by the committee endorsement and positive buzz about him at the State House, that should be a mere formality. —

Christopher Cousins

- **Bruce Poliquin: Attempted dealmaker?** The Boston Globe had [an interesting item yesterday](#) on U.S. Rep. Stephen Lynch's refusal to meet with President Donald Trump's administration, which the Massachusetts Democrat views as "extreme." But a Lynch aide told the Globe that he was first approached about that meeting with U.S. Rep. Bruce Poliquin, a Republican from Maine's 2nd District. Poliquin released a statement on Thursday saying Mainers want "want a government which works, not partisan bickering."

— *Michael Shepherd*

Today in A-town

The House and Senate are in today and [judging](#) by [their calendars](#), there is lots of routine

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paper shuffling in store. Both have many bills coming out of committee with ought not to pass votes. Divided reports are also piling up, as they are prone to do with split majorities in the House and Senate.

Among other issues, it looks like the Senate will debate the bill to [take the Legislative Council out of the Capitol Area development approval process](#), which failed in the House but faces better chances in the Republican-controlled Senate.

Several committees are in this afternoon. If you're interested, check out what they're up to by [clicking here](#)

— *Christopher Cousins*

Reading list

Best of Maine's Craigslist

Need a specific, erotic model? A "[mature erotic beefy/stocky smooth male model](#)" from New Hampshire is available for paid work. You know what you're getting.

Captain Not-Handsome Pants has a routine. A man [who warns that he's "not captain handsome pants"](#) wants a female friend to "meet up, smoke a bowl, grab some coffee" and talk. "If other stuff ever came up," he says, "we would smoke a bowl, get a coffee and talk about it...cause that's how we do."

A little bit of old school for ya. "A 29 year old female who was [madly in love with Aaron Carter](#) back in the day as a young teen" is looking for another woman who "once had teen lust for the young hottie" to go to New York City for a show in April.

[Here's your soundtrack](#)

and I'm sorry.

— *Michael Shepherd*

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