



***Full upper house expected to approve nomination Feb. 22***

**BY TOM HESTER SR.**

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**UPDATED**

Gov. Chris Christie's nomination of Paula T. Dow as state attorney general was unanimously approved Monday by the state Senate Judiciary Committee.

The nomination is expected to be affirmed by the full Senate on Feb. 22.

Dow, of Maplewood, has been serving as acting attorney general for over two weeks. The former Essex County prosecutor and assistant U.S. attorney is the first African-American woman to serve as the state's top law enforcement official. She was also, according to reports, the first sitting county (Essex) prosecutor to be nominated as attorney general in over a century.

Dow was questioned for nearly five hours on a wide range of issues.

Dow confirmed she also took a \$24,000 annual pay cut moving from county prosecutor to attorney general where she will make \$141,000 a year.

But the approval of Dow's nomination did not come before she underwent nearly two hours of questioning by Sen. Nia Gill (D-Essex) over her decision to seek a waiver of a lifetime ban on any role in government for former Newark councilwoman Dane Rone, who was convicted in a Municipal Court of a disorderly persons charge for a 2008 incident in which she intervened in a

traffic stop involving her nephew and police in Newark.

On his last day in office, Gov. Jon Corzine pardoned Rone and lifted the ban effective in January 2014.

Gill quizzed Dow on why she sought overruled an assistant prosecutor who supported a ban a waiver for Rone, if Newark Mayor Cory Booker ever contacted her about a waiver for the former councilwoman, and if she had any role in Corzine's pardon.

Dow, with her voice raising at one point late in the discussion, responded that she believed Rone's action's did not rate a lifetime ban from government, that she never talked to Booker and that the first time she learned of Corzine's pardon was when she read about it in a newspaper.

Gill cited a newspaper article in which Booker said he lobbied for a waiver of a ban for Rone.

Dow said state law permits a prosecutor to agree to a waiver of the ban from government for a public official found guilty of a misdemeanor crime. She said she also took Rone at her word that she responded emotionally – and in a bathrobe – when she received a call from her nephew and heard him and officers exchanging loud comments. Rone was found guilty of a disorderly person charge in Fairfield Municipal Court where the case was moved.

“Respectfully senator, I disagree with your conclusions And the way you are trying to steer the facts,” Dow told Gill. “Underlying all you've said is a suggestion, an insinuation; I was influenced by the mayor or by the article. I was not influenced, I was not contacted. I am very proud of myself for handling this in an independent way.”

Dow told the committee that serving as attorney general is unlike any challenge she has even experienced or expected.

“Each day has expanded my appreciation for the department (of Law and Public Safety) for its

enormous responsibilities and my high admiration for the department and the depth of the important work it does.”

She added she would seek the counsel of experienced Attorney General's Office staff.

“I am humbled by fact Governor Christie has expressed faith in me publicly,” Dow said. She added, “But make no mistake, in the end the responsibility for the department's actions, its priorities and its actions rest solely with me.”

Dow said that has Essex prosecutor she attempted to crackdown on violent crime, public corruption, illegal drug distribution, fraud, and police misconduct and that she will attempt to do the same as attorney general.

Sen. Raymond Lesniak (D-Union) brought up that he attempted to have the two Elizabeth men who broke into his Elizabeth home in April and threatened to kill him committed to a court-guided drug treatment program rather than jail. He said one was accepted and the other denied because of earlier crimes.

Lesniak is sponsoring legislation to expand eligibility for admission to drug court and he asked Dow if she supports expanding the program.

Dow replied that the expansion of drug court would have her full support.

“I'm sorry you had to experience something like that,” she told Lesniak. “Over the last seven years I've seen first hand (drug court) graduates in tears talking about the benefits of drug court. It is truly a life-changing experience. There are certain people with problems that can be addressed in forum different from straight up jail. In many respects, it's a better approach.”