

## Griffo, Seward on short list for majority leader

There's turmoil in the state Senate as Republican Senate Majority Leader Dean Skelos faces corruption charges.



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Joseph Griffo, R-Rome



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There's turmoil in the state Senate as Republican Senate Majority Leader Dean Skelos faces corruption charges.

And even as Republican leaders say they are not pushing Skelos to step down, two local names have come up as possible replacements.

State Sens. James Seward, R-Milford, and Joseph Griffo, R-Rome, are mentioned, along with a handful of others.

Other upstate Republicans whose names are being mentioned include Syracuse's John DeFrancisco and the Southern Tier's Tom Libous. Several Long Island senators' names also have come up.

So far, the Senate has made no moves to force Skelos to step down, and Seward and Griffo are adhering to that stance.

But they also are both saying they would be interested if Skelos were out of the picture.

"Should there be a vacancy and should my colleagues think I could fill that role, I certainly would consider it," said Seward, who has been in office since 1987. "But it is all hypothetical but flattering."

Griffo spokesman Rocco LaDuca said Griffo's mention is a tribute to his skills and talents.

"I think if the need arose and the opportunity presented itself, Sen. Griffo has always been willing to accept the role of leadership," LaDuca said.

Griffo has been in the Senate since 2007. He previously served as Oneida County executive and Rome mayor.

Skelos and his son Adam were arrested Monday on charges of extortion, fraud and bribe solicitation.

The charges come a few months after longtime Democratic Assembly Majority Leader Sheldon Silver stepped down amid unrelated corruption charges.

Senate Republicans are taking a wait-and-see approach, observers said.

"I think clearly on a political side, they have no consensus alternative," said political watcher Gerald Benjamin of SUNY New Paltz. "Skelos wants to continue and has assured them he has done nothing illegal."

If Skelos does leave, the choice of a successor probably will be based on several considerations.

First, there might be a regional power struggle, as upstate and downstate Republicans vie for influence, Benjamin said.

"It has to do with relationships and it has to do with regional politics," he said, adding that it might depend whether the Hudson Valley Republicans opt to favor the upstate or Long Island branches of their party.

Hamilton College government Professor Phil Klinkner said the ability of any potential leader to bring in money for his party also is a factor. That could be a stumbling block for Griffo and Seward if the position opens, he said.

"They come from upstate and don't have access to that much cash," he said. "I would think it would be someone from downstate or the Capitol Region who has access to money in a way I don't think anyone from this area of upstate does."

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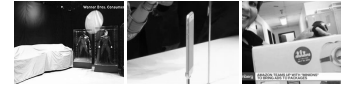
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