



DiMasi: Port a leader in state

Speaker taking a lot of heat lately, praises eco-friendly furnace

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NEWBURYPORT — Hours after introducing a bill on Beacon Hill that aims to create 13,000 "green" jobs in the state, House Speaker Salvatore DiMasi praised city officials and Mark Richey Woodworking for leading the state in environmentally friendly initiatives.

During a visit to the city, DiMasi specifically praised Richey's biomass furnace, which uses wood to heat the factory, and the city's new ordinance that designates wind-turbine use as an appropriate use in the industrial park.

"You are a leader. This community is a leader in the entire state," he said. "I'm very impressed by the work being done right here."

DiMasi, a Democrat, also took time to address recent allegations by state Republicans who are calling for an ethics investigation into his conduct in dealing with a friend who is a lobbyist. He has been criticized recently in the Boston press, with stories indicating that he had used his position to aid a friend's company seeking a contract with the state.

He also accepted a \$250,000 mortgage loan from a friend who has registered as a lobbyist.

But DiMasi said the allegations are "baseless."

"Everything I've done in 30 years has been done in the highest standards of ethical conduct," he said. "Nothing we do is inappropriate. Everything that will be determined out of this thing will show that I acted appropriately on everything."

State Rep. Michael Costello of Newburyport and state Sen.

Steve Baddour of Methuen, both Democrats, also defended DiMasi. Costello said often politicians come to the aid of their constituents when they ask for help. For instance, Costello said he helped get Richey, a friend, a permit from the state Department of Environmental Protection for the biomass furnace.

"It is not a conflict. He is a constituent," Costello said. "It is part of what we do."

Baddour added, "I think the speaker is doing what the speaker does in terms of leading an agenda. (He's) getting back to business."

Beacon Hill politics aside, DiMasi visited the city yesterday to tour Richey's 85,000-square-foot plant. Afterward, DiMasi, who appointed Costello to his current role as chairman of the Public Safety Committee, attended a fundraiser for the representative on Plum Island.

At the woodworking plant, DiMasi heard an explanation of Richey's \$500,000 biomass furnace, which heats the business during the winter by burning the factory's byproduct: wood.

The system collects the wood shavings during the summer, about 300,000 pounds a year or 6,000 pounds per week, and during the winter, a computer-controlled heating system takes the byproduct and burns it in a furnace at temperatures of up to 2,800 degrees.

"This is what we like to see and encourage," the speaker said.

About two dozen local leaders, including Mayor John Moak, Sheriff Frank Cousins and Nancy Colbert, the city's planning director, listened as DiMasi promoted the bill he filed yesterday to create more "green" jobs.

The bill, which Gov. Deval Patrick supports, would put \$13 million a year for the next five years into the Massachusetts Clean Energy Technology Center. DiMasi said the center will provide grants to start-up companies that specialize in green initiatives to help train workers.

"This is all about protecting our environment," DiMasi said. "We could be in an energy crisis if we don't take action ourselves."

Before leaving the woodworking business, DiMasi took moment to praise Costello, whom DiMasi said he met when the representative was just 11 years old.

"He is a fantastic legislator," DiMasi said. "He has a lot of energy. He has a lot of ideas. He is a leader."