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Monday, October 15, 2018 (Photo: Kevin R. Wexler/NorthJersey.com)

Alvarez is not the first Administration hire to spark an embarrassing political flare-up, although he is certainly the highest profile one and the allegations against him of the most explosive kind.

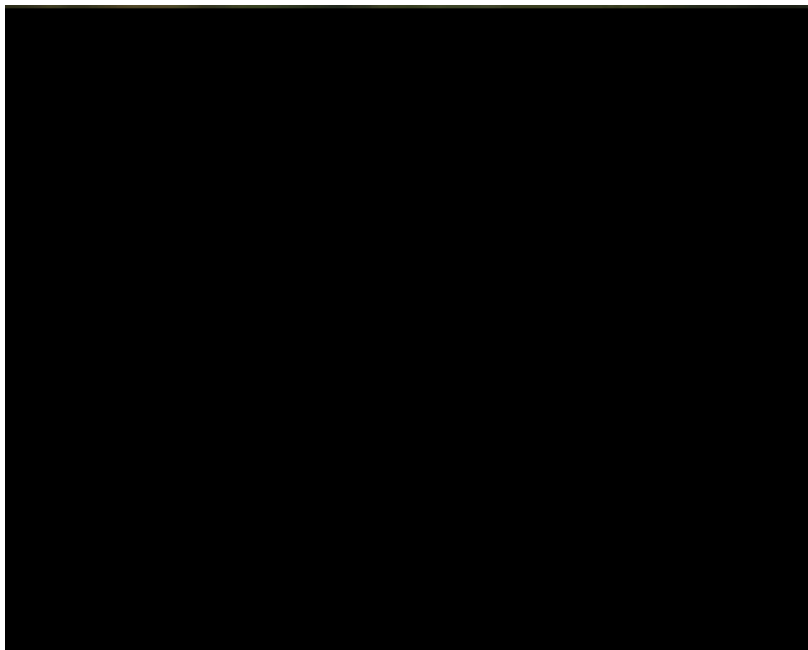
Marcellus Jackson, a former Passaic City Council member was forced to resign from his \$70,000 a year position in the Department of Education after it was revealed he served 25 months in a Federal prison for accepting \$26,000 in bribes in 2007, a conviction which should have disqualified him from holding a public office.

And, more recently, an Edison public school teacher who had been suspended for 120 days after it came to light that she had uttered slurs against children suffering from learning disabilities was dismissed from a \$70,000 a year job in the Department of Education.

Despite its comparatively low profile, the transition process is crucial in assuring that competent, qualified individuals are placed in positions of significant authority and it must carry out its responsibilities while coping with considerable pressures exerted relentlessly by political and personal forces.

County leaders, elected officials at all levels, major campaign donors, personal friends and supporters of the candidate flood the transition offices with resumes and letters of recommendation -- all attesting to the quality and integrity of the person they support along with suggestions that the new Administration will falter and perhaps fail unless an offer of employment is made.

Campaign staffers must be given serious consideration as well. They have, after all, devoted many months of their lives to the cause of the candidate and, upon victory, feel entitled to be brought into the Administration.



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These are the areas the investigating committee will focus on with emphasis on the decision-making process followed in the appointment of Alvarez, despite Brennan's repeated efforts to bring her story to the attention of Administration officials.

By insisting that the transition office bore the responsibility for the appointment, Murphy has placed it at the core of the committee's inquiry.

But, the committee enjoys an open-ended time frame, giving it considerable leeway to branch out into seeking information directly from cabinet officers and the governor's office on their rules and procedures for hiring staff. The committee will also re-visit the decision by the Hudson County Prosecutor's Office which declined to pursue charges against Alvarez.

It is, of course, impossible to separate political considerations from the process. Anyone who believes otherwise is hopelessly naïve.

It does not, however, logically or fairly follow that individuals with political histories and backgrounds are automatically unworthy of consideration. Politics should not be the rationale for a position, but it should not be used to deny one either.

There exists a certain degree of nervousness concerning the investigation, a foreboding sense that it may turn up some embarrassing moments involving instances of favoritism for political allies or heavy contributors.

The lid, though, has been lifted and any effort to return it will produce an outcry neither the governor nor the Legislature wishes to confront.

There is a larger end to be gained, however. Justice for Kate Brennan. No matter what emerges, never lose sight of that.

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