

Bromwell abandons challenge

Face-off with Miller for Senate president not to occur, he said; Pair 'kissed and made up'; Miller confident he will extend record-setting tenure

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Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller has patched up his differences with one of his top lieutenants, averting a challenge to his record 14-year tenure in one of the state's most powerful positions.

Sen. Thomas L. Bromwell of Baltimore County told fellow Democrats yesterday that he would not attempt to replace Miller when the General Assembly convenes Jan. 10.

Democratic leaders said Bromwell, 51, would continue to serve as chairman of the Finance Committee, one of the Senate's most prestigious posts. He had been expected to leave the General Assembly to take a job as chief executive of the state's Injured Workers Insurance Fund but changed his mind this month.

Miller, 58, stopped short of confirming that Bromwell would keep his coveted chairmanship. But he indicated that he is inclined to forgo punishing one of the Senate's most popular leaders.

"We put one issue behind us each day. At this point in time, we've settled the issue of the election," Miller said. "Obviously, consequences flow from actions such as this, but Senator Bromwell extended an olive branch to the Democratic caucus, and I'm confident it will be accepted."

Bromwell's decision to back off from a potentially divisive coup attempt came as Senate leaders gathered in the Thomas V. Mike Miller Senate Office Building, still in its final stages of completion. The two Annapolis heavyweights made peace in a closed-door meeting of Democrats after three Republicans in Senate leadership were asked to leave.

"There is no challenge," said Montgomery County Sen. Ida G. Ruben. "It turned into a love-fest."

Bromwell had been angered by Miller's reported opposition to his plans to back John R. Schneider, Bromwell's top aide and driver, as his replacement in the Senate.

During yesterday's meeting, Bromwell expressed his unhappiness with Miller, focusing on what he said was meddling by Miller in his district. But as one Democrat put it, the two then "kissed and made up."

Miller emerged from the meeting predicting victory.

"I feel confident the Democrats will vote for me, and I'll be president of the Senate. I'm working very hard at it," the Prince George's Democrat said.

Ruben and other Democrats dismissed the threatened contest as a passing dust-up exaggerated by the press. But Republican senators confirmed that U.S. Rep. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. had urged GOP senators to consider an alliance with disgruntled Democrats to replace Miller. Senate Democrats outnumber Republicans, 33-14.

continued on next page

Without criticizing Ehrlich, Senate Minority Leader Martin G. Madden distanced GOP senators from that effort yesterday.

"I'm not aware of any Republican senator who got a call from a Senate colleague" on Bromwell's behalf, said Madden, a Howard County Republican.

Madden confirmed that Ehrlich urged five GOP senators at the party's state convention last weekend to "keep our powder dry, keep our options open; that there could be something in the air."

Reports of Republican involvement in the majority party's traditional role of choosing the president apparently helped unify Democrats behind Miller. "That was a major miscalculation," one prominent Democratic lawmaker said.

Other senators said Sen. Clarence W. Blount, the Democratic majority leader, made an impassioned speech saying he would do nothing that might help the Republicans gain influence.

Those remarks, which made clear Blount was on Miller's side, undercut claims made last week by Bromwell supporters that all nine African-American senators were supporting Bromwell.

Miller said he would remember the role of Ehrlich, whom he derided as a "[Newt] Gingrich clone," when the Senate starts carving new congressional and legislative district lines in 2002.

"I am a partisan Democrat. I will be a player in reapportionment and redistricting," Miller said.