

# Possible loss of lawmakers worries Balto. Co. leaders

The exodus of Bromwell, other veteran legislators threaten power, they say

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SUN STAFF

The expected departure of Sen. Thomas L. Bromwell, chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, and the possible exodus of other influential Baltimore County lawmakers threaten to weaken the region's influence in the General Assembly and Maryland, several leading Democrats say.

"It does appear that Baltimore County is seeing a number of important statesmen retire from the legislature, Bromwell among them," said Dana Stein, chairman of the Baltimore County Democratic State Central Committee. "There seems to be a domino effect in place but with this latest turnover, new opportunities will unfold."

Stein said there is no heir apparent for Bromwell's Senate seat. Bromwell has informed colleagues that he will resign to assume the \$200,000-a-year post as head of the state's Injured Workers Insurance Fund, a job Bromwell rejected more than a year ago.

Baltimore County Councilman Joseph Bartenfelder, a gentleman farmer from Fullerton, is considered by some to be among the leading candidates for the 8th District Senate seat Bromwell will vacate.

Bartenfelder would not comment on whether he'd seek Bromwell's seat, or whether he'd been approached to run. He said Bromwell's departure — and the probable exit by November of at least four other key county legislators — "could be devastating."

"The county will lose leadership that made positive things happen in Baltimore County and throughout the entire region," said Bartenfelder. "We are going to need strong voices in the Senate" to keep significant projects, such as the county's east-side revitalization, funded and on track.

Others mentioned as possible Bromwell interim successors, his seat is up for re-election in November

— include several members of the district's state central committee, Bromwell's wife, Mary Pat, and the senator's older son. The Bromwells, who reside in White Marsh, could not be reached for comment.

If the central committee appoints an interim senator, the recommendation would go to the governor, who usually goes along with it as a courtesy.

The power drain from the ranks of Baltimore County's delegation to the General Assembly could be considerable, the leaders said. In addition to Bromwell, those likely to go include:

■ Sen. Michael J. Collins, an Essex Democrat, who confirmed last week that he is seriously considering retiring from the Senate to pursue a job in education. Collins is a respected floor leader and a crucial bridge from Annapolis to Towson in helping get more than \$800 million in state and county funds to redevelop Essex, Middle River and other older communities.

One potential successor to Collins is Randy Cogar, a member of the county Planning Board and Democratic State Central Committee. Cogar, who runs a Middle River printing business, said this week that he is interested in examining whether to run for Collins' seat.

■ Sen. Barbara A. Hoffman, chairwoman of the Budget and Taxation Committee and a Senate member since 1983. Hoffman's 42nd District, which is primarily in Baltimore City but includes sections of Baltimore County, is an influential legislative voice for the county. She is vying for a top job at Johns Hopkins medical institutions.

■ Sen. Norman R. Stone Jr., the president pro tem emeritus of the Senate from Dundalk. He angered Gov. Parris N. Glendening with his votes and paid a high political price — Stone's old district was carved up by the governor in redistricting to include parts of Anne Arundel County. Stone has mounted a court challenge.

■ Del. Michael H. Weir, an Essex Democrat and House member since 1975. Weir was chairman of the Joint Committee on Chesapeake Bay Critical Areas and was vice chairman of the Environmental Matters Committee — important positions in a county with 175 miles of shoreline, much on the bay.

Others reportedly considering leaving the General Assembly are Del. John S. Arnlick, a Dundalk Democrat; Del. Joseph J. "Sonny" Minnick, a Dundalk Democrat and restaurateur; Del. Thomas E. Dewberry, a Democrat and speaker pro tem from Catonsville who is slated to receive a judicial appointment; and Del. Donald E. Murphy, a Catonsville Republican.

Some area officials fear such a substantial loss for Baltimore County could cause a power shift in the legislature away from the Baltimore area to Montgomery and Prince George's counties.

"We see that slippage in power already but what's happened is that the county delegation has been decimated," said Sen. Delores G. Kelley, a Randallstown Democrat. "The back benchers will now have to step forth and rise to the occasion."

Veteran politicians said that with a new governor and a large number of rookie legislators settling in during the 2003 session, Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller and House Speaker Casper R. Taylor Jr. could enjoy a somewhat wider latitude for pushing favorite programs such as legalizing slot machines at racetracks and in Western Maryland.

Robert J. Romadka, former county central committee chairman and an Essex lawyer, finds the possible loss of so many veteran county lawmakers "unbelievable. There will be lots of musical chairs played but in the end it will be surprising how fast the void is filled."

For the senate's majority whip, Sen. Paula C. Hollinger of Owings Mills, "Changes like this are cyclical and usually happen with redistricting but the numbers are worrisome.

"The fact of life is we might be seeing more of this because it's becoming more and more difficult to earn a living being in the legislature and working another job," Hollinger said.

"Tommy [Bromwell], Mike [Collins] and I came into the house together and losing them will be massive ... to Maryland, and to me."