

1990 election already on horizon

6-21-89

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FREDERICK POST

ANNAPOLIS — With the filing date for candidates in the 1990 elections only a year away, and with all 188 General Assembly seats up for grabs, speculation has begun over who will seek new terms and who will retire.

In Frederick's six-man delegation, conjecture focuses on the intentions of the county's two venerable representatives, Sen. Charles H. Smelser, District 4, and delegation chairman Del. James E. McClellan, District 3B.

Together, the two Democrats have over 40 years of legislative experience in Annapolis. Mr. Smelser spent two four-year terms in the House of Delegates and has been in the Senate for 22 years.

Mr. McClellan was first elected in 1978, and will complete his third term next year for a total of 12 years.

Rumors have it that Mr. Smelser might retire — he will be 69 on July 4. Mr. McClellan, the county's top vote getter, will seek re-election.

In 1986 Mr. Smelser's popularity was reinforced with a substantial primary victory over Goodloe Byron Jr., son of U.S. Rep. Beverly Byron. Mr. Byron's family name made him a serious contender. He was Mr. Smelser's first primary opponent since 1974.

During a recent interview, Frederick's senior senator said he was "leaning toward it," when asked his re-election intentions.

As if to confirm that, Mr. Smelser, at the invitation of Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller, recently joined the small elite inner circle of Senate leadership which sets policy for the Maryland Senate.

Mr. Smelser also holds a powerful and influential post as chairman of the Senate Capital Budget Subcommittee.

"With the capital budget and everything, and all the big programs coming up, I'd like to be a part of it," he said.

Still, Mr. Smelser would not make any commitment, saying there were plenty of other considerations. "I have to look to my family," he said.

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"And there are the business people I'm involved with. I really have a load and I've got to thin it out someplace."

Mr. Smelser is a retired farmer, is president of the New Windsor State Bank and has other business interests.

Mr. McClellan, on the other hand, shows less enthusiasm about continuing his service in the State House. The retired veterinarian says, simply, "I really don't know. A lot of things have changed down here, and at this point I really haven't decided. I've been in politics 16 years when this term is up, four as an alderman in Frederick and 12 in Annapolis."

He says he is so uncertain of his political plans that he cancelled a major fund-raiser which was scheduled for last April 30. "I don't want to take any money if I know I'm not going to run," he said.

The high turnover in the legislature during the last few terms, with younger, more liberal and aggressive lawmakers, has prompted some of the old guard to retire.

"There's no doubt about it," says Mr. McClellan. "Things have changed here considerably. The camaraderie isn't there anymore, and you can't take a man's word to the bank anymore. He'll tell you he's going to vote one way and he turns around and does the opposite."

Mr. McClellan's strong suit as a legislator has been his ability to convince his colleagues of the need for funding and taking care of problems in Frederick County and Western Maryland.

He has a remarkable record of bringing home the bacon by persuading the House Appropriations Committee, of which he is a member, to approve bond issues for Frederick projects.

He works closely with Mr. Smelser, with whom he shares mutual respect. Mr. Smelser, on the Budget and Taxation Committee, works the Senate side of the hall on behalf of Frederick with the same zeal.

Mr. McClellan has made it clear that if Mr. Smelser chooses not to run in 1990, he is definitely out. "I guarantee you," he said, "that if Charlie doesn't, I don't. With Smelser out, it can push me towards not going again. Without him, every bond bill would be dead in the water before it arrived."

He indicated concern over a lack of a qualified candidate to represent the district in the House. "I don't see anybody on the horizon now to take the seat," he said, "but if the right person comes along, I'll support him or her."

"Still, I'm not going to give up because I don't feel the same as

before. I'm still going to give it my all.

"In the end, I'm going to have to talk it over with my family. I'll be 64 and there's life after this."

The veteran delegate said he would definitely announce his intentions one way or the other by next April 1, "to give those who do want to run plenty of time to prepare."

The deadline for those filing in the 1990 primaries is July 2, 1990.

The four other members of the Frederick delegation all appear ready to campaign for re-election.

Sen. John W. Derr, 47, District 3, the only Republican member of the delegation, said, "I certainly am planning to (run), barring any unforeseen circumstances."

Mr. Derr was appointed to the Senate in 1983 to replace the late Edward P. Thomas, and elected in his own right in 1986.

Del. George H. Littrell, 54, District 4A, will also seek a third term. "I plan to ask the people of Frederick to allow me to represent them one more time," he said.

Del. Royd Smith, 56, District 2B, the only freshman legislator, said he is eager to serve a second term. "Oh, my gosh, yes!" he said. "I'm very satisfied here and with being on the Environmental Matters Committee," said the delegate, who has already forged to the front as one of

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the leading environmentalists and conservationists in the legislature.

"I'm going to run like thunder, like a fury."

Mr. Smith, who survived a severe bout with cancer three years ago, says his only concern is persistent rumors that he is again seriously ill with the disease. "I had it three years ago, and I'm just as healthy as a bear," he said. Mr. Smith is a frequent early morning jogger in the state capital during the legislative sessions.

Del. Thomas H. Hattery, 35, District 4A, says he too, will seek reelection for a third term. "I would assume so," he said, "although it's too early to make a decision because nobody knows what's going to happen. I think it's wrong to announce before the end of the (1990) session, because there is a big difference between being a public official and a candidate."