

M A R Y L A N D

Leader in Md. Senate to Stay On

Bromwell, Head of Finance Panel, Was to Run Insurance Fund

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In the end, Maryland state Sen. Thomas L. Bromwell couldn't make the move.

Days before Bromwell was to retire from politics to take a lucrative job selling workers' compensation insurance, the influential Baltimore Democrat announced that he would decline the \$150,000-a-year post and stay in Annapolis, where he is considered a leading contender to become Senate president one day.

Bromwell's decision—delivered this weekend to state officials and reported in yesterday's Baltimore Sun—makes him the third person to turn down the job as chief executive officer of the Injured Workers' Insurance Fund. The quasi-public agency sells workers' compensation insurance to hundreds of Maryland businesses.

It also means the colorful former tavern owner who represents Baltimore County will remain as chairman of the Senate Finance Committee and as an icon of blue-collar Baltimore in the Maryland State House, where he has been a fixture for more than 20 years.

"I don't want to seem like I'm fickle . . . but, you know, money's not everything," said Bromwell, 51, who accepted the insurance job in September. "I would have been satisfied over at IWIF, but I also would probably gain more satisfaction in being chair of the Finance Committee."

He earns \$30,000 from his position in the General Assembly and

an unknown amount for his work as construction manager for the Network Technologies Group, a company that does Internet wiring.

The Injured Workers' Insurance Fund board reacted quickly, voting yesterday to elevate the current chief operating officer, Preston D. Williams, to CEO. Williams just as quickly accepted, said board Chairman Daniel E. McKew.

Legislative leaders, meanwhile, were caught off guard but largely unsurprised by Bromwell's change of heart. The senator had delayed his Senate resignation by a month as four others maneuvered for his chairmanship. Sensing that Bromwell might not let loose of the reins of power to take up the more sedate insurance job, Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller Jr. (D-Prince George's) postponed naming a successor.

"He's bored, and he's back. Sort of like John Riggins," Miller joked yesterday, likening Bromwell to the Washington Redskins running back who famously returned to the gridiron after a year in retirement with the line: "I'm bored, I'm broke, I'm back."

Said Miller: "It'll work out well because Tommy is a proven commodity. If there is no vacancy, everything will continue to be the status quo."

In Annapolis, where politicians are gearing up for the January start of the 2001 legislative session, many found Bromwell's original decision to leave the State House far more astonishing than his latest decision to stay.

The insurance job came open in early spring. In June, Del. Michael E. Busch (D-Anne Arundel), chairman of the House Economic Matters Committee, withdrew his name from consideration, saying he couldn't imagine trading his powerful legislative post for the fund's nondescript offices in suburban Baltimore.

Later, John P. Davey, a Prince George's County lawyer and longtime friend of Maryland Gov. Parris N. Glendening (D), also decided not to take the job.

Bromwell, too, had his doubts. But he said the money—the approximately \$150,000 a year plus \$50,000 in benefits—was too good to refuse, though he would have been required under state law to resign from elected office.

Meanwhile, Bromwell jockeyed behind the scenes to maintain his grip on political power. He insisted that his administrative assistant replace him in the Senate, a plan few liked. And he urged Glendening to appoint other political associates to the insurance fund board, a plan Glendening rejected, sources said.

By last week, it became clear that "all these things were not falling into place," one legislative observer said.

After considering his options over Friday night dinner with his wife, Mary Pat, Bromwell approached Glendening at Saturday's Army-Navy football game in Baltimore and told the governor he would stay.

"I hate to give up a \$200,000-a-year job," Bromwell said. "But the bottom line is I love the Senate."