

# Senator picked to lead state insurance fund

## Choice of Bromwell draws criticism over pay, credentials

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Tapping a new leader with legislative skills but little administrative experience, the state's Injured Workers Insurance Fund named Sen. Thomas L. Bromwell yesterday to one of the highest paying jobs in state government.

Effective Dec. 1, Bromwell, a Baltimore County Democrat, will give up his seat in the legislature to head the insurance fund that provides workers' compensation coverage to about 20 percent of Maryland's employers.

As chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, Brom-

well oversaw legislation affecting the agency he is to run.

The veteran legislator had been considered a leading candidate to someday become president of the Maryland Senate or to run for Baltimore County executive in 2002.

Bromwell's compensation package will include an annual salary in the range of \$150,000, plus pension contributions, annual bonuses and a \$30,000 car allowance, IWIF officials said.

Critics have contended that Bromwell, a former tavern owner and contractor, has few credentials for running what is in effect an insurance company with assets of more than \$1 billion.

Perhaps anticipating more such criticism, IWIF officials issued a statement highlighting Bromwell's "successful" six- [See Bromwell, 6A]

# Bromwell to head Md. insurance fund; critics dispute credentials, pay package

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year tenure heading the Finance Committee and his key role overseeing legislation affecting IWIF.

Bromwell was not available for comment but issued a statement through IWIF saying he was looking forward to taking the agency "to the next level."

The top IWIF job has been vacant since late February when Paul M. Rose, a close ally of Bromwell's, abruptly stepped down.

Rose, a former legislative auditor, took advantage of an executive employee buyout program that allowed him to leave the agency with a lump-sum payment of \$454,751.

Daniel E. McKew, chairman of IWIF's governing board, said Bromwell, 51, was picked with the aid of a national employee consulting firm, which helped the board set criteria for the job.

IWIF officials said they wanted a leader with experience dealing with state regulators and the General Assembly.

The number two job at IWIF was filled earlier this year by Preston Williams, an insurance executive who has worked for several major carriers.

Two other candidates, a state delegate and a former aide to the governor, were considered for the top post, but both turned it down.

McKew said the pay package being offered to Bromwell was about the same as that held by his predecessor.

Rose was drawing an annual salary of \$147,000 and also was eligible for annual bonuses. Last year Rose got a \$20,962 bonus.

In addition, McKew said, the Bromwell package includes \$25,000 a year in annual contributions to a retirement program and up to \$30,000 for a vehicle. Anything over \$30,000 would require board approval, McKew said.

Kathleen S. Skullney, executive director of Common Cause/Maryland, which pushes for stricter enforcement of state ethics laws, criticized IWIF's hiring of Bromwell and the handsome compensation package.

"I'd like to see an injured worker get that kind of a package," Skullney said. "This just shows how well conflicts of interest pay here in Maryland. The outrage is

over a system that allows this to happen."

## Critical time for agency

Bromwell's selection comes at a critical time for the agency. It is about to undergo its first financial review by the Maryland Insurance Administration under the provisions of a law approved by the legislature last year.

The law was recommended by a task force appointed by the governor after a series of newspaper articles that were critical of the agency and its operations. The statute also exempts IWIF from the state open meetings law. The board's last meeting in public is scheduled for 9 a.m. today.

Bromwell served on the task force and frequently defended the agency during public hearings.

A 22-year veteran of the state legislature, Bromwell is the former owner of a Baltimore County tavern and currently serves as the construction manager for the Network Technologies Group, a company that provides Internet wiring services.

In his statement, Bromwell cited the importance of workers' compensation insurance and said he wants to increase IWIF's share of the Maryland market to 25 percent. "I have great respect and passion for the importance of what this company does," he said.

In choosing to take the job, Bromwell is giving up a chance to vie for the powerful post of Senate president.

The current president, Thomas V. Mike Miller, said Bromwell has served in the General Assembly with distinction.

"His oratory on the floor of the Senate is going to be missed," Miller said. "As is his ability to preside over the committee and make certain that both sides left the room believing that in fact they had a fair hearing."

Two Democratic senators are thought to be Miller's leading choices for the plum assignment of Finance Committee chairman — Sen. Christopher Van Hollen of Montgomery County and Sen. Thomas M. Middleton of Charles County.

Both are considered smart and hard-working although Middleton, a moderate, would appear to be

closer politically to Miller than the more liberal Van Hollen.

The chairmanship is considered one of the most powerful in the General Assembly as the Finance Committee handles many high-stakes issues, including health insurance, horse racing and the state's public utilities.

It was also not clear who would take over Bromwell's 8th District Senate seat. The district's only other Democratic state official, Del. Katherine Klausmeier, said she was considering applying.

"I'll just have to work things out and work with the district and see how things happen," Klausmeier said. Bromwell's term runs through 2002.

The district's five-member Democratic State Central Committee will select Bromwell's successor, but observers said Bromwell will play a key role in making that choice.

## Opening up the race

Bromwell's departure from elected office also is likely to have a ripple effect in the race to succeed Baltimore County Executive C. A. Dutch Ruppertsberger, who cannot run for re-election in 2002.

With his high visibility and ability to raise campaign cash, Bromwell has often been mentioned as a possible successor to Ruppertsberger.

If, as expected, Bromwell forgoes a run for executive, the route to Towson becomes easier for other politicians weighing the race.

"I think he was one of the most well-known names," said county Councilman Stephen G. Sam Moxley, a potential Democratic candidate from Catonsville. "It does open up the race considerably."

In addition to Moxley, the most frequently mentioned Democratic executive candidates are Council Chairman Joseph Bartenfelder, Essex Sen. Michael J. Collins, Catonsville Del. Thomas E. Dewberry, Pikesville Councilman Kevin B. Kamenetz, county Circuit Judge James T. Smith Jr. and Essex Del. Michael H. Weir.

Republican candidates include Perry Hall Del. James F. Ports Jr. and former Towson Councilman Douglas B. Riley.

Staff writer David Nitkin contributed to this article.



**New chief:** Sen. Thomas L. Bromwell, shown here last April, will give up his seat in the legislature to head the insurance fund that provides workers' compensation to about 20 percent of the state's employers. SUN FILE