

After purge, GOP eyes gains in Senate

Brinkley's loss in primary raises question about direction Republicans will take in Maryland

By **BRYAN P. SEARS**

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Republicans in Maryland may need more than a unity rally if they are to seize what they perceive to be an opportunity to increase their numbers in the state **Senate**.

Leaders in the state's minority party say they believe as many as five seats held by incumbent Democrats could be in play in the November general election. The challenge will be

getting their party unified following a tough primary election where a number of incumbent Republicans were defeated.

The biggest among them was Sen. David R. Brinkley, R-Frederick, the Senate minority leader. Brinkley was handily defeated by first-term Del. Michael J. Hough, who essentially ran a tea party-style campaign and claimed Brinkley wasn't conservative enough.

"It's tough because we're a minor-

ity party in a blue state," said Joseph Cluster, executive director of the **Maryland Republican Party**. "We're focusing on local races because there's opportunity."

Currently, Republicans hold 12 of the 47 seats in the Senate but hope to increase that number to 16 by defeating Democratic incumbents such as Sen. Roy Dyson in Southern Maryland, Sen. Jim Mathias on the Eastern Shore, Sen. Ronald Young in Frederick County and Sen. Jim Brochin in

Baltimore County.

Opportunity comes as the party appears to be questioning what direction it should take and what it means to be a Republican.

Cluster said he does not believe Brinkley's defeat was "a purity test."

Brinkley's primary loss may be more unusual, given that Republicans statewide voted for Larry Hogan and Harford County Executive David R.

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Senate >> Brinkley's willingness to compromise cost him with voters in primary

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Craig, two candidates with a pragmatic approach, said Herbert C. Smith, a political science professor at McDaniel College.

"Hogan and Craig picked up 70 percent of the vote in the primary," Smith said. "The pragmatic approach was a winning approach."

Brinkley was seen as a moderate voice that helped give Republicans in the Senate a voice on some issues.

Brinkley's reputation as a moderate, however, gave Hough, and those who backed him, the political stick that was used to beat him — he was too willing to compromise and work with the majority party.

"The biggest beef against Brinkley was that he voted for the budget," said Mark Newgent, a founder of the conservative blog Red Maryland.

Newgent and his blog endorsed Hough over Brinkley. Hough, who was elected in 2010, is among a number of Republicans who are steadfast in their refusal to vote in favor of state budgets.

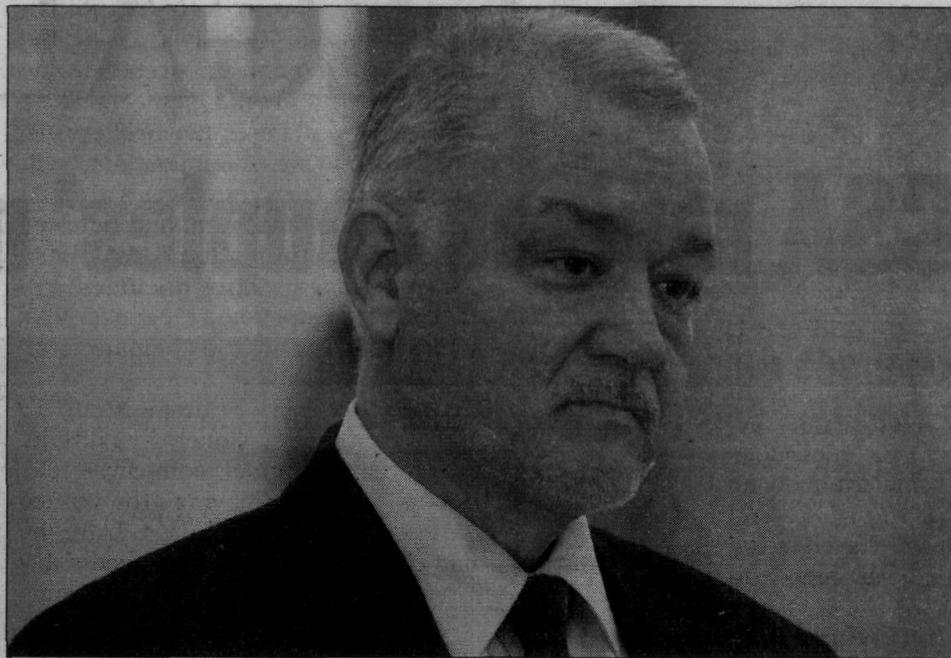
"(Brinkley) always ended up voting for the budget," Newgent said. "There are issues you can compromise on but not on the budget and spending. You can't compromise on that."

The Brinkley loss is not the first bitter, internecine battle the Republican Party has faced in recent years.

Andrew P. Harris defeated incumbent Sen. F. Vernon Boozer in 1998, and Del. Christopher B. Shank defeated Sen. Donald F. Munson in 2010. In both cases, Harris and Shank ran against incumbents they criticized as not being conservative enough.

"It's indicative of the frustration of Maryland Republicans who see that winning statewide races as improbable wins," said Richard Cross, a political blogger and columnist and former speech writer for former Republican Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr.

Republicans gathered in Severna Park on Thursday for a unity rally following the primary. Brinkley and Hough did not attend, and party insiders said they do not expect Brinkley to back Hough in the general election.



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His reputation as a moderate cost Sen. David R. Brinkley, R-Frederick, as GOP voters rejected his re-election bid in last week's primary.

Smith, the political science professor, said it will be incumbent on Hogan to take a page from Ehrlich's book in order to get his party pulling

in one direction.

"It's Hogan's job to establish party leadership now that he's the nominee," Smith said.