

City senators are quietly planning unified 'Courthouse ticket' for fall

THEODORE W HENDRICKS

The Sun (1837-1985); Jun 29, 1978; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Baltimore Sun (1837-1985)

pg. D5

City senators are quietly planning unified 'Courthouse ticket' for fall

By THEODORE W. HENDRICKS

A quiet move is under way among Baltimore city senators to form a "Courthouse ticket" that would include candidates for the office of clerk of the six courts of the Supreme Bench open in the citywide election this fall.

But sources indicate that there are significant objections to the move, based on suggestions that the patronage reward for such a unity ticket would allow senators to have a say in naming a chief deputy clerk or the person who serves directly under the clerk.

State Senator Robert L. Douglass (D., 45th) said yesterday that several meetings

had been held about the possibility of the unified ticket. All 11 senators have expressed an interest, he said.

"When we get this thing shaped up, we'll make a big splash and everybody will come in," Senator Douglass said. Senator Harry J. McGuirk (D., 37th) is also a moving force behind the ticket.

Although the make-up of the ticket is expected to be decided after Monday's filing date, certain agreements have already been made. The ticket will consist of four whites and two blacks and will include Elmer O. Harris, a liquor board member.

J. Randall Carroll, the clerk of the Court of Common Pleas and only black among the clerks, has not been invited to any discussions of the ticket. Mr. Carroll said yesterday he was the most qualified for the job but acknowledged he faces opposition in the election.

Last Monday's meeting of a group of city senators on the unified ticket raised the possibility that the patronage cost of the senators' powerful political backing might scuttle the plan. The objection was to political control of the chief deputy clerks, sources said.

The chief deputy clerk of a court ac-

tually runs the office, taking day-to-day responsibility for keeping dockets up to date, accounting for the money that comes in and handling detailed work required in operating a court.

While clerks face a citywide election every four years and must seek organized political support, they are also responsible to the judges for the operations of their office. Clerks attempt to choose a strong deputy, leaving some political leeway for other positions.

Any attempt to alter the delicate balance that traditionally exists raises the specter that court operations will come

under political control. Attempts to head off such control have been repeatedly backed by judges who, so far unsuccessfully, have supported moves to make clerks an appointive post.

Some clerks in the Courthouse cannot promise much patronage anyway. Lawrence A. Murphy, the veteran clerk of the Criminal Court, for instance, has his office under Civil Service.

Robert H. House, the clerk of Superior Court and president of the State Court Clerks Association, has faced two elections and has more than 10 years' experience in his job. He faces only nominal op-

position from William Allen, a deputy Criminal Court clerk.

One veteran clerk, John O. Rutherford, of the Baltimore City Court, has made no move either to file for re-election or to retire. His job may be one of the two sought by black leaders, the other being Mr. Carroll's post.

Ronald Wiley, who was appointed as clerk of the Circuit Court and has filed for election, and John F. Kelly, the clerk of Circuit Court No. 2, who is also seeking his first election, are the heads of the final two offices involved in the citywide ticket plan.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.