

Political Foe Given Broadwater's Seat

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It was shortly after 2 a.m. yesterday when former State Sen. Tommie Broadwater Jr., immaculate even at that hour in a tan suit, blue vest and handkerchief, drifted toward the front of the meeting room at the Glenarden Town Hall. Seated there, in a semicircle, were Sens. Thomas V. Mike Miller, Frank J. Komenda, B.W. Mike Donovan and Arthur Dorman.

All were exhausted from waiting while the Prince George's County Democratic Central Committee met in a closed session to choose a successor to Broadwater in the state Senate.

Once, Prince George's six white senators had called Broadwater a friend and a colleague. Now, they were bitterly divided over the question of who would take the seat vacated by Broadwater last month after his conviction in federal court on charges of illegally obtaining food stamps.

The six senators had lobbied heavily for Decatur W. Trotter, a longtime political foe of Broadwater's, who waged an unsuccessful battle to win Broadwater's seat five years ago.

What the senators all knew, even as they sat there in the early morning, what was preordained before the marathon meeting began, was that Trotter would be chosen, following in the long-

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standing Prince George's tradition of handpicked officeholders.

Broadwater, after trying unsuccessfully to get the seat for several others, had finally settled on Central Committee member Carolyn J.B. Howard. Her defeat was a final humiliating blow for Broadwater, who found he could not outduel the other senators on the turf he ruled so absolutely until this year.

Although 10 candidates appeared before the committee, only three were considered viable: Trotter, Howard and school board member Bonnie Johns. Another candidate who had once been endorsed by Broadwater, District Court Judge Sylvania Woods, dropped out hours before the hearing.

Yet, the senators were so confident that all day and all night, they had been telling people they had 13 of the 22 votes locked up for Trotter.

In the end, 13 of the 15 white Central Committee members voted for Trotter. Two whites and all seven blacks voted for Howard, bringing to a bitter climax one of the most frenzied periods in the county's turbulent political history.

After the formal announcement that Trotter's name would be sent to Gov. Harry Hughes for his pro forma approval, Broadwater, his words echoing through the emptying building, attacked Miller and the other senators. "They're going to come in here and tell us who we can have as our representative," he said bitterly. "That's a mistake. Trotter—we're going to help him. The Democratic Party is what's hurting now, because they [the senators] double-crossed the black community."

The scramble to replace Broadwater, who had become one of the county's most influential politicians as the leader of the black community, had created

great rancor among blacks scrambling to move up the ladder and among whites, who wanted his successor to be someone they could "work with"—a term many blacks viewed as a euphemism for someone the whites could control.

Even though Miller and his lieutenants had scurried around the huge, packed meeting room for six hours making sure their votes were in line, the sight of the clock creeping past 2 was making them jumpy.

"Shouldn't be taking this long," Komenda said, pulling hard on a cigarette.

As Broadwater approached, the group looked up tentatively. There had been few warm words among these men since Broadwater was arrested last March.

"What do you think, Tommie?" Miller asked, forcing a tired smile.

"What do you mean what do I think, Miller?" Broadwater answered. "I think I can count and I know what you all have done and I know it's Trotter just like you know it's Trotter. Damn, Miller, you think I was born yesterday?"

"I don't think anything, Tommie. You just never know," Miller replied.

But Miller did know. When he walked into the meeting room at 9 p.m. Tuesday night, Miller said cockily, "It's 13 and counting."

Trotter, who had been so confident he would win the seat that he had resigned from the orphan's court Tuesday in order to appear before the committee, acknowledged that choreography was part of the process. "It's the same system that's been around for 100 years," Trotter said. "It's the same system he [Broadwater] has benefited from in appointments and in his own rise to the Senate. If whites happen to be involved, well . . . I don't think that's the issue."

To Broadwater, however, that was the issue. For him, this was something of a last

stand. Throughout the night, he stood in a corner of the room, arms folded stoically. When a reporter asked him how it felt to watch people line up to take the job he fought so hard to win, he smiled.

"I'm dealing with it," he said characteristically.

As 120 speakers spoke on behalf of one candidate or another for the Glenarden-based 24th district, the room buzzed constantly. A caterer hired by the Town of Glenarden did nonstop business selling fried chicken and, it seemed, every politician who had ever had any influence in the county made an appearance.

Only once did the room go quiet and that was when it was Broadwater's turn to speak. When committee chairman Gary R. Alexander called him to the microphone, the ovation for the fallen senator began slowly, but soon everyone was standing and applauding loudly.

Broadwater had only two minutes. He accused his former colleagues of dictating to the people of his district. In the back of the room Miller, leaning against the wall, shrugged. "Tommie's called me a lot worse things in the past. Look, he knows the drill, he's seen this done for 20 years in this county."

As the clock struck midnight, the central committee retreated to a private room, allegedly merely to discuss the personalities of the candidates since the law requires that voting take place in public session.

"If they walk out of that room and Gary gives me a thumbs down, I'm leaving, I won't even wait to hear it," Miller said. "I've worked too hard on this to lose."

When the committee finally emerged, the thumbs were up and Miller balled up his fist and shook it happily. Broadwater, standing nearby, said softly to Miller, "I'll be back, you know. You're going to have to deal with me again. This isn't the end."