

# The Broadwater verdict

# Sudden departure creates

# political void among blacks

By Karen Hosler

Tommie Broadwater was Prince Georges county's first black political leader. His departure from the scene will leave a void the county may be a long time in filling.

Because of his conviction yesterday on federal charges of food stamp fraud, Mr. Broadwater will be forced by law to give up his state Senate seat and all the leadership clout and influence that went with it.

From the time of his sentencing, Mr. Broadwater will be considered suspended from the Senate until the appeals process is exhausted.

A temporary successor will be named by the Prince Georges county Democratic Central Committee within 30 days of the sentencing. If the senator's conviction is not reversed on appeal, a permanent replacement will be made.

But none of the likely candidates — Delegate Nathaniel Exum, Circuit Judge Sylvania W. Woods, Sr., and former delegate Decatur Trotter, an Orphans Court judge — is considered capable of filling the senator's shoes right away.

"It takes time to be considered a leader," observed Representative Steny H. Hoyer, the congressman from Prince Georges who is one of Mr. Broadwater's closest allies.

"Tommie is not universally loved, but he is respected for his ability to deliver," Mr. Hoyer said. "He is able to pull together a number of different factions. There will not be an automatic successor who can do that."

It may be that no one will be able to find the same measure of respect in both the white political establishment and the black neighborhoods, with their great bounty of votes.

"He had influence well beyond his district," said John T. McDonough, a Prince Georges county attorney and political strategist. "Blacks all over the county considered him their leader."

"When you can speak with one voice like that you have clout," Mr. McDonough said. "Without Tommie we aren't going to have one official speaking for the blacks anymore. For the blacks, that's a setback."

Mr. Broadwater's political passing marks an epoch in the emergence of black power in the Washington suburban county after a decade of struggling through racial transition.

The senator was a pioneer, a member of the first generation of black politicians in the county who came up the hard way and learned to play by the rules of the political game.

A former sidewalk huckster, gas station jockey and chief chef in charge of barbecue ribs, Mr. Broadwater recalls working his way out of an

impoverished childhood with a great deal of energy and a good bit of risk.

Several times, he told an interviewer a few months ago, he had to put everything he had and everything his parents had on the line to get ahead in his business enterprises.

Meanwhile, he was learning how to get ahead in politics: Join the group that holds the power.

In 1974, that was Mr. Hoyer, who was then about to become president of the state Senate; his behind-the-scenes partner, lawyer Peter F. O'Malley; and Winfield M. Kelly, the ultimately successful candidate for county executive.

Mr. Hoyer and friends needed a black Senate candidate on their ticket to represent the burgeoning black community in the central section of the county. They also wanted someone more agreeable than former Delegate Arthur King, who was running for the newly created Senate seat.

Mr. Broadwater proved available and accommodating. He and Mr. Hoyer et al have been trading favors ever since.

"The party machine said he was the deputy in charge of black folks," another black politician said of Mr. Broadwater. "Nobody got a political appointment or a job in the county if they were black, unless they were Tommie's [choice]."

In return, Mr. Broadwater was a particularly loyal member of an organization in which loyalty meant more than than almost anything else.

As a freshmen member of the Senate he mostly just delivered his vote. As a seasoned office holder, he delivered the votes of his constituents in the 1978 elections when the organization ticket was running again.

By 1971, Mr. Broadwater and the ever-growing number of black residents in Prince Georges county had reached the point where it made good political sense for Mr. Hoyer to name him chairman of his campaign in the special election for the 5th District congressional seat.

The election results were close enough to suggest that Mr. Hoyer might not have won without the margins Mr. Broadwater is believed to have helped provide in the black precincts.

By this year, Mr. Broadwater had begun in earnest to cash in on his political IOU's, becoming a power as chairman of a budget subcommittee dealing with prisons and transportation. This put him in a position to back up some of his earlier rhetoric about the concerns of black prisoners and urban transportation needs with action.

The long-term impact of yesterday's conviction on Mr. Broadwater's political career is difficult to measure. Colleagues said it is too soon to speculate on whether he could make a comeback.