

# Legislators close ranks around embattled Arnick

*But public outrage at allegations grows*

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As the controversy over John S. Arnick's alleged abusive conduct toward women continued to swirl in the State House yesterday, the women's legislative caucus decided not to withdraw its previous endorsement of him as a District Court judge.

After a meeting yesterday morning, the group issued a statement calling those allegations a "serious matter." But most members felt that the former state delegate's long career in government should not be destroyed by a single misstep, said Del. Sheila E. Hixson, the caucus chairwoman.

"Our endorsement is standing," said Delegate Hixson, a Montgomery County Democrat.

Mr. Arnick was accused Monday by a lobbyist for a women's shelter of having used lewd and vulgar language in a dinner meeting with her last year in Annapolis. On Tuesday, a state official who was with her at the dinner supported those allegations. A third woman came forth to say that Mr. Arnick made unwanted verbal and physical advances to her in another restaurant encounter.

The Senate Executive Nomina-

tions Committee scheduled a hearing tomorrow at noon to take additional testimony regarding Mr. Arnick's confirmation and is expected to vote on whether the veteran delegate and Dundalk lawyer should be confirmed for a full 10-year term as a Baltimore County district judge.

Sympathy for Mr. Arnick's plight grew among his former colleagues and associates in Annapolis yesterday, even as lawmakers kept their ears tuned to public sentiment that, based on telephone calls to their offices and radio talk shows, was running heavily against confirming the new judge.

Ms. Hixson said nobody in the caucus questions "the veracity" of Judy A. Wolfer, the 34-year-old Takoma Park lawyer who testified against Mr. Arnick's confirmation on Monday.

Ms. Wolfer told a stunned Senate committee that Mr. Arnick made vulgar and offensive remarks, many of them belittling women, to her and a female aide to Gov. William Donald Schaefer during a dinner meeting last February.

Ms. Hixson, who noted that Mr. Arnick has been single during most of his years in Annapolis and has

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gone out with many women, said: "Does he have a pattern of doing this with all kinds of women? We haven't seen it."

"No women," she added, "should be exposed to that, but I don't know why his career should be ruined for one instance."

Mr. Arnick has made no public statements since Ms. Wolfer's testimony. He has been invited to testify

at tomorrow's hearing, but committee Chairman Michael J. Wagner, D-Anne Arundel, said he has yet to hear from him.

Also invited to testify is Judy Hanford, a 45-year-old Baltimore County woman who has raised her own allegations about improper sexual conduct on Mr. Arnick's part. Nancy J. Nowak, the woman who accompanied Ms. Wolford to dinner with Mr. Arnick, is expected to submit a written statement. Now the

head of the state division of Parole and Probation, Ms. Nowak confirmed Ms. Wolford's account in a brief statement issued on Tuesday.

Legislators yesterday seemed eager to close ranks behind Mr. Arnick, a 59-year-old, six-term delegate, who has twice been majority leader of the House and who has chaired two standing committees, Environmental Matters and Judiciary.

"He was blindsided by this at the 11th hour," complained Sen. George W. Della Jr., a Baltimore Democrat. "Meanwhile, he's given up his law practice and resigned from the legislature. If we reject him now, what does that do to him?" Though, like almost everyone interviewed, Mr. Della added: "I don't condone the conduct that was described."

A number of lobbyists, male and female alike, who have worked with Mr. Arnick over the years also stepped forward on his behalf.

Franklin Goldstein, a veteran Annapolis lobbyist, volunteered: "I'm Jewish. I've been down here a long time. I've known John Arnick for a long time. I never believed he had



BY KRISTEN BREMMER

John Arnick at hearing.

any prejudice against Jews, blacks, Poles or women." Among Ms. Wolfer's allegations was that Mr. Arnick told several offensive ethnic and racial jokes.

In some quarters, there was almost a "boys-will-be-boys" quality to the defense for Mr. Arnick's behav-

ior. Virtually no one who knows him questioned whether he did what he was alleged to have done. And they suggested such language was not unusual in Annapolis.

"Ninety percent of the men and 85 percent of the women I have heard speak in a very similar manner," Sen. Patricia R. Sher, a Montgomery County Democrat, said.

Over the years, some female legislators have complained about the sexist atmosphere of the male-dominated Judiciary Committee Mr. Arnick chaired. But few, if any, have been willing to voice those comments publicly.

"We are all struggling with this," said Sen. Mary H. Boergers, a Montgomery County Democrat who lobbied for the National Organization for Women before becoming a legislator. "It would be easier to judge if this was someone we didn't know, if we could do it at a distance."

Though Delegate Hixson put on the outward appearance of unanimity in the women's caucus, Senator Boergers described the meeting as more "like a family feud."

"Some [women] just didn't want to have anything to do with this. But others, myself included, felt that we needed to highlight that this is a serious issue. It's not something that ought to be swept under the rug," she said.

Yesterday, the Maryland State Bar Association, the Women's Bar Association, the American Civil Liberties Union, and the Public Justice Center, a nonprofit organization that litigates civil rights and domestic abuse cases, all called on the Senate to delay any vote on Mr. Arnick's confirmation until a full investigation is conducted.

No matter how the 19-member committee votes on Mr. Arnick's nomination, the matter still must go to the full 47-member Senate for a vote. If his nomination is rejected by the Senate, his term will expire when the legislature adjourns in mid-April. He would be prohibited from reapplying for or being reappointed to the \$82,300-a-year job.

If the Senate should fail to act, he would lose the job when the session ends but could reapply.