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No support for Busch ouster

Proposal: Democrats fail to get behind a Republican offer aimed at replacing the speaker of the House of Delegates.

BY DAVID NITKIN

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AHOUSE of Delegates coup proposed by Del. Anthony J. O'Donnell does not appear to be imminent.

O'Donnell, the House minority whip from Southern Maryland, said he hasn't had any takers since offering this month to throw the 43 votes of the House Republican Caucus behind a new Democratic speaker -- hoping to topple Michael E. Busch.

O'Donnell accuses Busch of dishonest negotiating over slot-machine gambling, which has consumed most of lawmakers' energy in **Annapolis** this year.

Instead, Busch's defenders are rising to the challenge.

"I can think of no time when Speaker Busch's stature has been greater among members of the House Democratic caucus," said Del. Peter Franchot, a Montgomery County Democrat, in a statement responding to O'Donnell's offer. "His quiet resolve in the face of enormous political pressure -- from Gov. Ehrlich, Senate President Miller and an entire 'corrosive coalition' of organized gambling interests -- has reassured his caucus members and empowered progressive voices throughout the state."

Franchot also issued what he called a "pre-emptive warning" to any Democrat considering O'Donnell's offer.

"You would be placing your hat in the ring as the favorite son of Gov. Ehrlich and the Republican right, which has slashed funding for Maryland's colleges and universities [and] slashed Program Open Space funding while eliminating the Office of Smart Growth," he said. "You would also be the foot soldier of a corrosive coalition that finds it appropriate to place thousands of slot machines in places like Oxon Hill and West Baltimore, but rejects them for **Ocean City** and Timonium because they are not 'family friendly.'"

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