

# Delegate defies party in pay spat

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Carroll's Getty bucked  
when all-GOP board  
OK'd 650 percent raise

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SUN STAFF

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Ten years ago, a little-known Carroll County Republican named Joseph M. Getty broke ranks and took on Helen Delich Bentley, a congresswoman who was then the most powerful member of the state GOP.

It was the 1988 presidential campaign, and Bentley had quietly stashed thousands of dollars in campaign funds in Carroll's Republican coffers, in part to keep it away from a rival. When Getty, then a member of the county's Republican Central Committee, found out, he refused to keep quiet.

The Federal Elections Commission later fined the Republican National Committee and the treasurer of the county central committee.

Those who remember that incident won't have been surprised last week when Getty — now a delegate in the General Assembly — once again put party affiliation aside and asked the state attorney general, J. Joseph Curran Jr., to investigate the all-Republican Board of County Commissioners, who had just secretly given themselves a 650 percent pay increase. Commissioner W. Benjamin Brown dissented in the 2-1 vote.

...sort of thing that  
...be a great career  
...an ambitious politi-  
...Getty doesn't care.  
...don't view myself as  
...the political lad,  
...Getty

...don't have to measure my  
...or evaluate my stand based  
...this hurt me when I want  
...for senator, president or  
...? I can walk away from it  
...torrow."

...Then the 46-year-old Manches-  
...Republican heard last week  
...the county's all-Republican  
...Board of Commissioners had  
...he immediately wrote to  
...and asked him to investi-  
...The temptation to say that  
...fired off a letter" wanes in  
...the face of the quiet, measured  
...to be used.

...By the end of the week, pres-  
...from Getty, other state dele-  
...gation members and the public hit  
...mark. On Thursday, the com-  
...missioners rescinded their pay in-  
...crease.

...If you are in power and he per-  
...ceives something is not right, it  
...does not matter which party you  
...are in," says Del. David R. Brink-  
...ley, a Frederick County Republi-  
...can.

...The assessment is bipartisan.  
...Cheryl C. Kagan, a Montgomery  
...County Democrat who serves on a  
...committee with Getty, says he is  
...known for his stances on cam-  
...paign finance and ethics reforms.

...Getty looks like the slightly old-  
...er brother of Bill Gates, the Micro-  
...soft tycoon. But his style is dis-  
...tinctly different. Mild-mannered  
...and thoughtful, Getty tells county  
...residents who call him "delegate"  
...that his name is still Joe.

...He elected last month to his  
...second term, he says he draws his  
...inspiration from Carroll County  
...history. If Getty seems to know  
...more about such history than  
...most people, he has good reason.

...His mother was a Roop, from a  
...family that settled in Carroll in the  
...1800s. His father's family, he says,  
...goes back "only to the 1860s."

...His father was mayor of Man-  
...chester, and Getty lives there with  
...his wife and six children in the 140-  
...year-old brick colonial where he  
...grew up.

...I remember all those political  
...discussions around a pot-bellied  
...stove in my father's workshop,"  
...Getty says. "People would talk  
...politics and solve all the world's  
...problems."

...He has a bachelor's degree in  
...American studies from Washing-  
...ton College in Chestertown and a  
...master's in American civilization

from George Washington Univer-  
sity. He earned a law degree in  
1996 after nearly four years of  
night school.

Getty's law office is an unas-  
suming house on Main Street in  
Hampstead, down the road from  
Manchester. He calls himself a  
typical small-town lawyer. He has  
no staff and answers the phone  
himself. His briefcase is a  
well-worn canvas bag.

Getty, who once worked in his-  
torical preservation in Washing-  
ton, has published several vol-  
umes on local history through his  
own Noodle-Doosey Press — a  
19th-century nickname for his  
hometown, where residents often  
hung noodles outside to dry.

Fearing a conflict of interest, he  
gave up publishing when he be-  
came director of the Historical So-  
ciety of Carroll County.

The issue of open government  
recurs in Carroll history, he says.  
Pressed for an example, he recalls  
a former county commissioner — a  
family friend, for whom Getty  
named his oldest son — who often  
spoke of a secret tunnel where  
elected officials would go to make  
decisions out of the public eye.

There was the Bentley incident  
in 1988, which drew widespread  
attention.

And in 1996, Getty cited the  
county planning commission for  
violating the state Open Meetings  
Act when members conducted  
business by electronic mail in  
what he called "public debate in  
private." He has since drafted leg-  
islation on electronic communica-  
tion.

Not everyone agrees that Getty  
did the right thing last week when  
he wrote to Curran.

"I think he jumped the gun too  
fast," said state Sen. Larry E.  
Haines, a fellow Republican and  
chairman of the county's delega-  
tion. "But I still hold Joe in ex-  
tremely high regard."

This year, Getty helped rewrite  
election law. "That kind of work  
can be like watching paint dry,  
really tedious, yet Joe was keenly  
interested," says Brinkley.

He hopes this year to switch  
from the Commerce and Govern-  
ment Affairs Committee to Judi-  
ciary. His children's baby sitter was  
killed by a drunken driver recent-  
ly, and Getty wants to sponsor  
tougher legislation.

When the General Assembly is  
in session, Getty drives home ev-  
ery night to Manchester, prefer-  
ring the company of his wife and  
six children, ages 9 months to 16  
years. He often skips early morn-  
ing meetings so he can drive the  
children to school, which is in the

same building he attended and  
where his wife, Susan, teaches kin-  
dergarten. She was his high school  
sweetheart.

"I love the intellectual chal-  
lenges, planning strategy around  
bills and the floor debates," he  
says. "But I try to balance it all  
with being home, talking to the  
kids about their day."

Though he enjoys politics, his-  
tory remains his first love, he says.  
He gave the Lincoln Day address

to the General Assembly this year,  
weaving family history and county  
connections to the Civil War into  
the speech, which he said "defines  
me."

Abraham Lincoln, who began  
his career as a state legislator,  
"was a humble man from humble  
beginnings, who always consid-  
ered his role in elected office as be-  
ing foremost a servant of the peo-  
ple," Getty said in the address  
Feb. 16.

He ended with Lincoln's Get-  
tysburg Address, the same words  
his great-great uncle heard as a  
young boy standing on the battle-  
field. Getty recited the words from  
memory.