

GOVERNMENT

Kach goes rural to fill his ticket with Shore's Addie Eckardt

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Del. A. Wade Kach, a candidate to become House Minority Leader, has chosen Del. Adelaide C. "Addie" Eckardt to be his whip as the two wait on a June 17 vote to select new House GOP leadership.

Kach, R-Baltimore/Carroll counties, and Eckardt, R-Mid Shore, are running against the team of Dels. George C. Edwards, R-Garrett, and Anthony J. O'Donnell, R-Southern Maryland, to succeed Alfred W. Redmer Jr., and Kenneth D. Schisler, who were appointed to state jobs last week.

Edwards and O'Donnell entered the leadership race first, but Kach, the longest-serving GOP House member, has support from Baltimore and Anne Arundel County delegates. Choosing Eckardt, Kach said, should alleviate concerns about not selecting a running mate, as required by party rules.

"We have a ticket that will be able to address the needs and concerns of both the rural and suburban," Kach said. "She's a hard worker, she's a consensus builder...I think she's the right choice."

With the departure of Redmer to be-

come State Insurance Commissioner, Kach said, Eckardt — a retired nurse and member of the House Appropriations Committee — will bring needed health care experience as the **Legislature** considers Medicaid reform, **CareFirst** matters and other insurance legislation. As the state works to plug an estimate \$1 billion shortfall next year, Eckardt will also bring GOP concerns to Appropriations.

"Obviously with the financial times we're going through, the budget is at the forefront," Kach said. "We need someone on Appropriations who has knowledge of the budget because we need to keep up to date."

Kach and supporters have criticized Edwards for his position on the Appropriations Committee, questioning whether he could devote enough time to party business. Edwards and O'Donnell's supporters questioned whether Kach and Eckardt really represented the party.

"I'm not really sure how she's going to represent a majority conservative caucus," said Del. Carmen Amedori, R-Carroll.

Eckardt, Amedori said, this year voted for a House version of the budget that included a property tax increase and extensive

taxes on business and has voted pro-choice in the past. Choosing Eckardt, she said, may raise second thoughts among the minds of Kach supporters. Eckardt could not be reached for comment yesterday.

But Del. Pat McDonough said Kach and Eckardt balance the regional needs of a party looking to expand upon suburban gains made by Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. Eckardt comes from the same Eastern Shore district as Schisler.

"The governor is already strong in the rural areas," McDonough said. "We don't need more strength in the rural areas. We need to grow in the suburban areas."

Kach supporters also have questioned the ability of Edwards, who lives farther from Annapolis than any other delegate, to conduct business in the capital city and at his family store in Garrett County. Edwards and O'Donnell have called those concerns

baseless.

Selecting Eckardt, said Don Murphy, chairman of the **Baltimore County Republican Party** and a former delegate, means the real start to the leadership race. Prior to her selection, Murphy said, Kach did not have a "credible" campaign.

The battle to succeed Redmer and Schisler, he said, could be the most contentious in party history.

Either ticket needs a simple majority vote, cast anonymously, of House GOP delegates for election. It is likely that only 41 or 42 GOP votes — depending on when Schisler resigns from the House — will be cast, Murphy said, because the **Baltimore County Republican Central Committee** is unlikely to choose someone to fill Redmer's House seat by June 17.

Among those already interested in the position are John C. Cluster and Mike Repp, who unsuccessfully ran for General Assembly seats last fall, and Bruce Robinson, a former candidate for orphan's court judge. Other prospects include House Minority Caucus staffer Chrissy Nizer and Senate Minority Caucus staffer Jeff Getek, both active in Baltimore County political circles.



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