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The Baltimore Sun

July 5, 2005 Tuesday
FINAL EDITION

SECTION: LOCAL; The Political Game; Pg. 2B

LENGTH: 689 words

HEADLINE: Top aide to 2 House speakers is leaving;
Annapolis: After 11 years in a powerful legislative role, Tom Lewis is calling it quits.

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BODY:

MUCH OF THE heavy lifting in government gets done by people about whom the public never hears.

That's why the name Tom Lewis is not widely known outside a certain circle in Annapolis.

For the past 11 years, Lewis, 48, has served as top aide to two speakers of the House of Delegates - spending eight years with Casper R. Taylor Jr. and, most recently, three years with Michael E. Busch.

The position has made him one of the most powerful staffers in Annapolis. He has served as gatekeeper, negotiator and advocate. His fingerprints mark some of the most significant pieces of legislation of the past decade, including environmental and economic development packages and Medicaid reform efforts.

A quiet presence in the State House, Lewis is also one-half of one of Annapolis' behind-the-scenes power couples.

His wife, Victoria L. Gruber, is a top aide to the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee. So breakfast table conversation in their household could often determine much of the course of the state's \$26 billion budget.

Some have quietly grumbled that Lewis wields too much power. But the overwhelming opinion in Annapolis is that he is a dedicated public servant adept at representing the interests of majority House Democrats - especially in its frequently contentious dealings with the state Senate.

Last week, Lewis announced he would be leaving state government, where he has worked since 1983, except for a two-year stint in the Peace Corps.

A major factor in his decision: the taxing hours demanded by the legislative position, especially for a family with two young children.

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He has accepted a job as director of state affairs for the Johns Hopkins Institutions, which includes the Johns Hopkins University and the Johns Hopkins Health System.

"Tom has made a tremendous contribution to public policy and provided a great benefit to the citizens of the state of Maryland," Busch said in a statement.

Lewis said it was "a very hard decision to leave my work with the legislature, and Mike Busch," but he called the chance to work for Hopkins an opportunity too good to pass up.

Two other lawyers in the speakers' office, Kristin Jones and John Favazza, will assume Lewis' duties.

Montgomery Co.'s Perez eyes attorney general's job

Even though Attorney General J. Joseph Curran Jr. has indicated he will seek a sixth term in office, Thomas F. Perez, a Democrat who is president of the Montgomery County Council, is laying the groundwork for a run.

Perez held a fund-raiser last week in Washington that raised \$30,000 for a possible campaign.

While he is hesitant to challenge Curran, Perez said he wants to be prepared in case the 73-year-old incumbent chooses not to seek re-election. Curran has raised the prospect that he would reconsider his candidacy if it were harming the prospects of Baltimore Mayor Martin O'Malley, a presumed Democratic candidate for governor.

O'Malley, married to Katie Curran O'Malley, a city judge, is Curran's son-in-law.

"If I did nothing now, I would be taking myself out of the race prematurely," Perez said.

The youngest of five children of Dominican Republican immigrants, Perez was born and raised in Buffalo, N.Y., and graduated from Brown University, Harvard Law School and the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard.

Perez worked as a federal prosecutor and deputy assistant attorney general for civil rights under former U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno, and was director of the Office for Civil Rights at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Curran "embodies the modern progressive movement here in Maryland. I am very respectful of what he has accomplished," Perez said. "I think I would be a very worthy heir to his progressive legacy if he decides not to run."

Perez said he is not sure how much money he would need to wage an effective statewide campaign because it has been years since the attorney general's job was open. But he said he would tap a national network of sources.

He said he has scheduled fund-raising events in Los Angeles, San Francisco and Boston, places where he has lived and worked.

"I intend to run a campaign that reaches every county in the state," he said.

LOAD-DATE: July 5, 2005