

Philadelphia

Politics: A No-Lynne Situation

Feuds! Money! Endorsements! The race to replace D.A. Lynne Abraham is about everything but putting criminals behind bars

BY **ADMIN** | FEBRUARY 24, 2009

Only there wasn't. And so the gift of sudden incumbency that insiders say probably would have gone to Common Pleas Court judge Leon Tucker (judges don't have to resign while being considered for a special board of judges election, but do if they run in a primary) never materialized, setting the stage for the horse race now galloping its way toward May 19th.

Nominating petitions are due to the city commissioners' office on March 10th. At minimum, the Democratic field for the primary — and in a city where Dems out-register Republicans six to one, the Democratic race is where the action is — is likely to include at least four candidates: McCaffrey, 44, whose brother, Seamus, is a popular Supreme Court judge known for his own free-wheeling campaigning; Dan McElhatton, 59, the garrulous former city councilman with close ties to mayor Michael Nutter; Michael Turner, 52, a trial lawyer with deep roots in Northwest Philly politics who's running as the bookish, Nutter-y doppelgänger; and suave Seth Williams, 42, the race's early front runner, who floored City Hall with an audacious campaign against his old boss Abraham in 2005, a move she still sees as a vicious betrayal. (For their part, the Republicans will likely run 34-year-old **Scott Sigman**, a rising star in the firm of legal powerhouse George Bochetto.) In Philadelphia parlance, it's a race between the swaggering Irish guys (McCaffrey, McElhatton, and attorney Brian Grady, a dark horse), the wonky black guys (Turner, Williams), the potential long shot (Tucker, if he quits the bench), and the GOP sacrificial lamb (Sigman).

With the field basically set, the race is likely to come down to three basics: who gets what endorsement, who can raise the most money, and who can get the most field troops on the ground to lure voters to the polls for an election most people aren't even aware is happening.

This much we do know: Lynne Abraham won't be endorsing Seth Williams. While her political director, Eleanor Dezzi, says breezily that the D.A. hasn't decided if she'll endorse at all ("I don't think we really know the lay of the land yet. We'll have to wait and see"), the 2005 challenge by her former protégé — Williams was an assistant D.A. from 1992 to 2003 — has left a lingering, bitter aftertaste the D.A. hasn't been very successful at hiding. Abraham was a strong mentor to Williams: She promoted him, she came to his father's funeral, she was a guest at his wedding. So when Williams challenged her in the last primary, she was both stunned and furious. "There was *a lot* of bad blood spilled," says one politico who knows both of them. "Lynne felt like Seth should have waited. And that he tried to play the race card."

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