

Quillen Quits Best GOP Seat in South

It had to happen. At a time when a flood of 46 U.S. House members are exiting Congress this year—the retirees ranging from 34-year Democratic veteran **Sam Gibbons** (Fla.) to scandal-singed Republican freshman **Enid Greene Waldholtz** (Utah)—it was widely anticipated that the oldest and one of the two most senior GOP members would call it quits. Sure enough, **Jimmy Quillen** of Tennessee, who turned 80 on January 11, announced last month that he was stepping down from the 1st District seat he has held with little trouble since 1962. (Quillen is tied with fellow 17-termer **Joe McDade** of Pennsylvania for the title of senior Republican in the House. The senior Republican in Congress, however, is **Bob Dole**, who came to the House in 1960 and has been in the Senate since 1968.)

The race to succeed the soft-spoken, universally liked Quillen is particularly noteworthy because, for all intents and purposes, his successor will be chosen in the Republican primary August 1. In fact, the East Tennessee-based 1st District is the most durable Republican-held turf in the old South—one that stood behind Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War and has not elected a Democratic congressman since 1878.

Older readers may best remember the 1st as the home base of Rep. **B. (for Brazillia) Carroll Reece**, the swash-buckling conservative who held it from 1920-30, 1932-46, 1950-61. The most decorated World War I veteran in the House, Reece in between terms in the '40s served as Republican national chairman when his party broke a 16-year Democratic reign to win both houses of Congress (1946-48) and was the GOP nominee against Democrat **Estes Kefauver** for the U.S. Senate in 1948.

Following Reece's sudden death in March 1961, his widow, **Louise**, won the special election to fill out his term. The following year there was a Republican primary battle among five strong conservatives, all friends or political associates of the late congressman. The winner, with 29% of the vote, was then-State Rep. **Quillen**. His victory was in large part due to his endorsement by **Louise Reece**.

Now, 1st District Republicans are poised for their first contested U.S. House primary in 34 years.

Anyone's Game

If there is any significant difference between 1962 and 1996 in the 1st District, it is that the outgoing lawmaker has not yet blessed a successor. When pressed about it, **Quillen** told reporters he had not made up his mind because, "I don't know who's running," but hinted he may have more to say when the filing deadline closes in May. That is why most political eyes in the district are focused on one of the congressman's closest friends, State Rep. **Ralph Cole** of Kingsport. After initially announcing he wasn't going to run for Congress, the 69-year-old **Cole** later hinted he might change his mind and would have an

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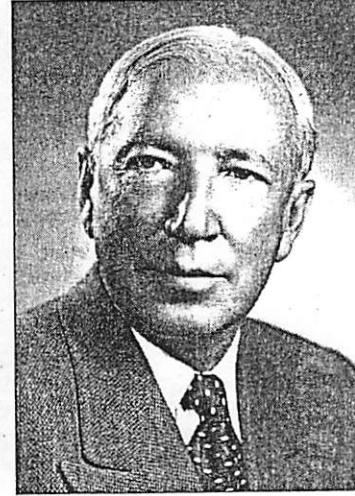
BY
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Harold Ford



Jimmy Quillen



B. Carroll Reece

announcement when the legislature adjourns later this month.

Among conservatives, the present favorite is State Sen. **Jim Holcomb** of Bristol, who meshes economic and cultural conservatism. "Jim led the fight against special legislation for homosexuals and is proudly pro-life," Tennessee Conservative Union Chairman **John Davies** said of the onetime basketball star at Georgetown University. "He'll start with the same core group of activists that works hard for a **Pat Buchanan** or an **Alan Keyes**, but has proven he can win among more establishment Republicans."

Along with **Holcomb** and perhaps **Cole**, at least a dozen state legislators and local officials are vying for the cherished Republican nod. Among the other notables are State Rep. **Richard Venable**, Sevier County District Attorney **Al Smutzer**, Sevier County Executive **Larry Waters** and Carter County District Attorney **David Crockett**, descendant of **Davey Crockett**, who served three terms in the House from Tennessee (1826-30 and 1832-34).

Another candidate whom, sources say, **Quillen** assuredly does not want to see nominated is health care entrepreneur **David Davis**. The multimillionaire businessman had launched his bid for the seat even before the venerable congressman opted for retirement.

In addition to the solid Republican nature of the district, the GOP balloting August 1 will prove pivotal to selecting **Quillen's** successor because the Volunteer State is alone in the Old Confederacy in not requiring a run-off. This means that the top-vote-getter August 1 will be the nominee no matter how small his percentage.

Ford in the Driver's Seat?

Like **Jimmy Quillen**, Democrat **Harold Ford** of Tennessee is stepping down from a seat on which he has had a lock for many years—since 1974, in fact, when the mortician and scion of a prominent Memphis political family became the first black congressman from his state.

Unlike **Quillen**, **Ford** (lifetime American Conservative Union rating: 5%) makes no bones about his choice for a successor: his 29-year-old son **Harold, Jr.**, who is just completing his studies at the University of Michigan Law School. Despite young **Ford's** lack of any political experience, Memphis sources say, his name and his family's proven political punch (several **Fords** hold office, including the congressman's brother, State Sen. **Johnny Ford**) should be enough to give him top place in the Democratic primary August 1.

This is not to say, however, that **Ford** will be coronated this summer. At least 11 Democrats are either running or exploring the race in the 9th District. The most prominent is Shelby County Commissioner **Michael Hooks**, whose wife is a Memphis city councilwoman. Moreover, Memphis Mayor **W.W. Herenton** makes little secret of his distaste for the **Fords** and is sure to throw his support behind anyone but "child **Harold**."

For six grueling years, the elder **Ford** was under indictment on federal charges of bank and tax fraud stemming from a \$1-mil-

lion loan he received from rogue banker **C.H. Butcher, Jr.**, and which the government charged that the congressman used for personal purposes. A jury split 8 to 4 along racial lines for acquittal, with charges of jury misconduct leading Judge **Odell Horton** (who is black) to pick jurors for the retrial from mostly white **Jackson**.

Later, acting U.S. Atty. Gen. and Bush holdover **Stuart Gerson** supported **Ford's** request for a Memphis jury—making his decision a day after he and Clinton White House aide **Webster Hubbell** (slated to become associate U.S. attorney general) met with the Congressional Black Caucus. The furor over the meeting and **Gerson's** decision led then-U.S. Attorney (and now Tennessee GOP Rep.) **Ed Bryant** to resign in protest, and a judge denied the request for a new jury. Finally, a second jury was chosen and in April 1993 acquitted **Ford** in a surprise decision.

Although **Ford** had relatively little trouble winning renomination and reelection during his legal turmoil, there was evidence of some chinks in his political armor. In 1990, for example, 16-year State Rep. **Pam Gaia** (who is white) drew a handsome 35% of the vote against **Ford** in the Democratic primary—the most anyone had received against the incumbent in his own primary, in which more than 60% of the participants are black.

In 1990, '92, and '94, Republican opponents held **Ford** beneath his usual 60-plus percentage of the vote. The strongest recent GOPer is **Rod DeBerry**, who never stopped running after racking up 42% of the vote two years ago. "Even with **Harold, Sr.**, going, the splitting up of the vote and controversy over his tapping his son to succeed him really enhances the chance of a Republican winning the 9th," said **Gaia**, who now works for the Criminal Court Clerk in the county. **Gaia** pointed out that her race against **Ford** helped convince her that Democrats in Tennessee "were just too corrupt." Two years ago, the lifelong Democrat switched to the GOP and campaigned for Republican Senators **Fred Thompson** and **Bill Frist**.