

Celebrating Maryland's New Frontiersman

At noon today, some of the state's most seasoned political veterans will arrive in Monkton, the heart of Maryland's hunt country, at a small, quaint house, "Bachelor's Quarters." There they will celebrate a watershed event in state history: the 40th anniversary of the election of Joseph D. Tydings to the U.S. Senate.

Politicians win and lose elections all the time, and people rarely observe the anniversaries of political campaigns. But Maryland's modern political culture was born in that 1964 campaign.

Four years earlier, John F. Kennedy's presidential campaign had awakened millions of Americans to public life. Many national leaders today, including Bill Clinton and John Kerry, trace their political involvement to his victory that year. The '64 Tydings campaign called forth Maryland's version of the "New Frontiersmen."

JFK carried Maryland in 1960, but his election did little to change state politics. In the 1940s and '50s, tobacco, slot machines, railroads and the beer industry were the staples of the state's public life. Maryland was dominated by Baltimore City ward bosses and by rural state senators. The prevailing political mood was not Kennedy-style idealism, but cynicism.

Joe Tydings came to Maryland

political life with both optimism and a political pedigree. His father, Millard, had served as speaker of the Maryland House of Delegates and spent four terms as a U.S. senator. FDR famously and unsuccessfully tried to unseat him. Millard Tydings's courageous challenge to McCarthyism finally cost him his seat in 1950.

Joe attended the University of Maryland and its law school and was elected to the House of Delegates at 26. He helped JFK carry Maryland in 1960, and after his inauguration, Kennedy appointed Tydings, 34, Maryland's U.S. attorney over the opposition of all but one member of the state's hidebound congressional delegation.

Tydings introduced anti-corruption prosecution to the U.S. attorney's office in Maryland. He sent to jail two congressmen and the speaker of the House of Delegates in the first of Maryland's two savings-and-loan crises.

Veterans of the U.S. attorney's office during Tydings's tenure include Ben Civiletti and Steve Sachs—later attorneys general of the United States and Maryland, respectively—as well as the late John Hargrove, an African American who went on to become a distinguished federal judge.

Tydings's U.S. Senate candidacy threatened the political establishment, which put forward a formidable

opponent in response: Louis L. Goldstein, then a budding Maryland political icon and the state comptroller. But the Tydings theme, "Working for Maryland, Not the Machine," energized suburbanites, blacks, young professionals and the reformers, derisively labeled "the shiny-brights." Against considerable odds, Tydings beat Goldstein in the primary and went on to an easy victory over the Republican incumbent, Sen. J. Glenn Beall Sr., in the general election. Tydings's victory was the beginning of the end for clubhouse politics in Maryland.

Tydings's campaign attracted young stars, including Paul Sarbanes, now in his fifth term as a U.S. senator, breaking the record previously held by Joe's father. "Tydings alumni," the veterans of his campaign and his Senate office, went on to distinguished careers of their own. Al From, a Senate staffer, now runs the centrist Democratic Leadership Council. Dick Schifter became a well-known diplomat. J. Hardin Marion, Frank Gallagher and Arnold Weiner became leading Maryland lawyers.

As a senator, Tydings authored significant legislation, including a bill that established the federal magistrate judge system. He also became a national spokesman for progressive

causes, including gun control, and that became his undoing. He lost the 1970 election by a single percentage point to J. Glenn Beall Jr., son of the man he defeated six years earlier.

Tydings has not served in elective office in 24 years, but he still looms large in Maryland public life. As a lawyer in private practice, he has spent 15 years on the University of Maryland Board of Regents. No voice in Maryland is stronger for higher education. At age 76, he continues to exude the vigor and freshness that changed Maryland politics forever 40 years ago. The years have not robbed him of an ounce of the integrity and public spirit he brought to the campaign trail.

The 1960 Kennedy and 1964 Tydings campaigns were historic for two reasons: They changed the political culture in a fundamental way, and they introduced a new generation of talented young people to public life. Few campaigns can make these claims, which is why Marylanders in Monkton will be celebrating a 40-year-old political victory this afternoon.

The writer, a lawyer in Greenbelt, served for 16 years as a Democratic member of the Maryland legislature. His e-mail address is tmaloney@jgllaw.com.