

Perez Joins Md. Attorney General Race

2nd Montgomery Official Seeks Democratic Bid

By STEVE VOGEL
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Montgomery County Council member Tom Perez launched his campaign yesterday for the Democratic nomination for Maryland attorney general, seeking to become the first Latino elected to statewide office in Maryland history.

CAMPAIGN 06 Perez, 44, a former federal prosecutor, portrayed himself during a campaign kickoff in downtown Silver Spring as a passionate crusader for the underprivileged, saying he would work "to help those in need, to lend voice to the voiceless and to build vibrant, inclusive communities."

Perez, who has represented Silver Spring on the council since 2002, joins Montgomery County State's Attorney Douglas F. Gansler among declared candidates for the Democratic nomination to succeed J. Joseph Cur-



BY KEVIN CLARK — THE WASHINGTON POST

In Silver Spring, Stephen H. Sachs, left, Maryland attorney general from 1978 to 1986, endorses Montgomery County Council member Tom Perez "because of what I will call, simply, character."

ran Jr., who is stepping down after five terms.

Perez enters the race with less cash and, in the view of some political observers, less visibility than Gansler, who has successfully prosecuted high-profile cases during eight years as Montgomery's chief prosecutor. Gansler did not wait for Curran's retirement

announcement this month to raise more than \$1.4 million and line up support across the state. Perez has raised almost \$275,000, said his campaign treasurer, Daniel Parr, and will not select a campaign manager until later this week.

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Perez Seeks Democratic Bid For Attorney General in Md.

But Perez embraced the role of underdog yesterday. "My friends, I have heard it before. I have been written off, overlooked and counted out frequently in my entire life," he said.

Perez, appearing with his wife and three children, choked up when speaking of his parents, immigrants from the Dominican Republic. His father died when Perez was 12, and his mother died last year.

Perez grew up in Buffalo, the youngest of five children, and worked his way through school collecting trash and loading goods at a warehouse. After attending Harvard Law School and the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Perez worked as a federal prosecutor and later as deputy assistant attorney general for civil rights in the U.S. Justice Department.

Both Perez and Gansler are claiming the mantle of Curran, though the popular outgoing attorney general has said he will not endorse a candidate for the party nomination. Perez said yesterday that he would "build upon" Curran's record in the fields of consumer, civil and environmental rights.

Gansler made a similar pledge during his announcement last week, but Perez said yesterday that he has a stronger track record. "I have talked the talk and walked the walk," he said.

Before announcing his candidacy, Perez received an attorney general's opinion clearing him to run, even though he did not meet a state constitutional requirement that he practice law in Maryland for 10 years. He joined the state bar in 2001.

Perez received a strong endorsement from Curran's predecessor, Stephen H. Sachs, who served two terms as attorney general from 1978 to 1986. "I am drawn to Tom Perez because of what I will call, simply, character," Sachs said. "Character is difficult to define, but it is palpable nonetheless."

Also standing beside Perez was Republican Howard A. Denis, a former state senator now serving on the County Council. Denis declined to describe his appearance as an endorsement but said he has been impressed with Perez, par-



Steve Melov backs Tom Perez for the Democratic nomination for Maryland attorney general. Perez, the son of immigrants from the Dominican Republic and a former federal prosecutor, plans to appeal to the Latino community and portrayed himself at his campaign kickoff as a champion of the underprivileged.

ticularly when the two co-sponsored a hearing into Pepco's performance after Hurricane Isabel. "He's a person of tremendous skill and wonderful temperament," Denis said. "When we first met, I was prepared not to like him, but we just clicked."

There may be other candidates for the Democratic nomination. State Sen. Brian E. Frosh (D-Montgomery) said yesterday that he is considering the race and is speaking to potential backers. Scott L. Rolle, the state's attorney for Frederick County, is seeking the Republican nomination.

Perez hopes to capitalize on his heritage with appeals to the large Latino community in the Washington suburbs. "Making history — First Maryland Latino Attorney General," read one prominent sign at the Silver Spring rally. Perez gave several interviews in Spanish.

Dario Morales, 20, a Montgomery College student from Silver Spring, held a sign reading "Immigrants for Perez."

"He's always been there fighting for immigrants and all disenfranchised people," Morales said.

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