

Parties consider pact in court races

By **David McKay Wilson**
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Democratic and Republican leaders would cross-endorse candidates.

Westchester political leaders may strike a deal to put a former Democratic county chairman on the bench in exchange for letting a Republican Supreme Court justice run for re-election without Democratic opposition.

Meanwhile, a proposal to cross-endorse Republican Family Court Judge Orazio Bellantoni was rejected because Democrats refused to back someone who runs on the Right to Life Party line.

The Democrats on Thursday

endorsed Doris Friedman of Irvington for that race.

The talks between GOP County Chairman Anthony Colavita and Democratic County Chairman Dennis Mehiel are expected to resume in April.

"We'll try to sit down and try to work something out," Colavita said.

The Democrats want an accord to ensure a position on the Westchester County Court for Richard Weingarten, the former county chairman.

His son, Mark Weingarten, the Democratic Party's executive director, in January railed against a proposal to cross-endorse a candidate for the county Board of Legislators, saying it would "disenfranchise voters."

He said yesterday that judges were different from legislators.

"I don't see an inconsistency," Mark Weingarten said. "People are constantly arguing that it should be an appointed position."

To win Republican support,

Mehiel said Democrats would endorse Vincent Gurahian of Somers, a Republican whose term on the state Supreme Court expires this year.

"It's the right thing for Gurahian, the right thing for Weingarten and the right thing for the public," Mehiel said.

To pull off the deal, the leaders would need the support of their Westchester county committees as well as those in the other four counties in the Ninth Judicial District: Rockland, Put-

nam, Orange and Dutchess. Rockland GOP Chairman Vincent Reda said yesterday he would agree.

The last cross-endorsement deal — a multiyear accord for five judges — was made in 1989.

A challenge by the Ninth Judicial Committee was struck down by the New York Court of Appeals in 1991. Committee member Doris Sassower said the group opposed a deal this year.

"This is the absolute height of hypocrisy and arrogance," she said. "This is a brazen replay of the judge trading we challenged in 1990."