

Another kind of speaker

Reading clerk is big talker in House

By Sean Scully
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

ANNAPOLIS — The most distinctive and authoritative voice of the Maryland House of Delegates belongs not to the House speaker or any of his powerful lieutenants, but to a 23-year-old law student known simply as William.

William Honablew Jr. is the reading clerk of the House. It is his job to read the endless lists of bills, resolutions, motions and announcements that clog the daily session. He reads in a unique style reminiscent of an auctioneer. It is a rapid-fire monotone that is almost hypnotic.

"Every reading clerk comes to the podium with his own style," Mr. Honablew said with a shrug and a shy smile when pressed to explain his delivery.

So skilled a talker is Mr. Honablew that he once managed to blast through the entire 141-name roll of the House in just over 90 seconds.

And every name was intelligible.

For his trouble, he received a vigorous round of applause — the first time in anyone's memory that a reading clerk has received the unanimous approval of the House.

"He's really done well," said Delegate John Arnick, Baltimore County Democrat. "The kid's got real drive. ... He started off a little bit on the shy and awkward side and he's done so well. Everybody appreciates that."

Funny thing is, other than the two years he has spent as clerk, Mr. Honablew has no formal experience as a reader. He learned his fast-talking ways as a child. He and his cousins would imitate John Moschitta, the lightning-tongued pitch man made famous by a series of Federal Express television ads in the 1980s.

"I thought that was really funny, how fast he talked," Mr. Honablew said.

But he stumbled on the House reading job by accident. After graduating from the University of Maryland with a political sci-



Photo by Bert V. Costello/The Washington Times

Reading clerk William Honablew Jr. gives the House of Delegates an earful with his rapid-fire delivery.

WILLIAM HONABLEW JR.

Reading clerk, Maryland House of Delegates

Born: July 4, 1973, in Washington, D.C.

Residence: Baltimore

Education: B.A., political science from the University of Maryland, Baltimore campus, 1995.

Career: House reading clerk, 1996 and 1997 General Assembly sessions

Family: Wife Lyn; son, William III, 8 months.

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ence degree, he decided to look for a job as a legislative analyst with the General Assembly. Chief Clerk Mary Monahan noticed some computer experience on his resume and decided to try him out in her office — the only male on staff.

And after a single reading test

on the microphone, Mr. Honablew had found a new home.

"I love working with [House Speaker Casper Taylor]," Mr. Honablew said. "I guess we've built up a kind of timing."

The speaker says Mr. Honablew helps to keep the daily session moving forward smoothly.

"I think we have a good chemistry — timing and body language," said Mr. Taylor, Allegany County Democrat.

Mr. Honablew, who makes \$6,000 for the three-month legislative session, said he plans to keep reading for the House for the time being. Eventually, however, he wants to finish his degree at the University of Maryland Law School and take up some sort of public-interest law. That drive comes in part from his past. Growing up in the District and in Prince George's County, he said he saw poor and uneducated people abused because they didn't understand the law.

But his desire to practice law is partly shaped by his experi-

ence in Annapolis — seeing the workings of a citizen legislature. Rather than becoming cynical or jaded by his firsthand view of lawmaking, Mr. Honablew has become increasingly impressed.

"People don't realize that the laws were created to protect little people. ... When I was young, I thought the only way you could talk to a politician is if you had a lot of money and a lot of leverage," he said.

Instead, he said, he has seen delegates who are, by and large, regular people — accessible, thoughtful and committed to their job.

Mr. Honablew's admiration for the institution has translated into an evident wonder that he has a chance to be an important part of it.

"These people are leading the state," he said, gesturing toward the empty House chamber, "and I'm reading to them."

■ John Hayden contributed to this article.

With clock winding down, lawmakers feeling fuzzy

By Sean Scully
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

ANNAPOLIS — By this point in the session, members of the Maryland General Assembly seem to operate on automatic pilot some of the time. With only two weeks to go before adjournment of the 90-day session, the final days have become an indistinguishable blur of voting sessions and committee meetings.

In the space of two hours, the House of Delegates sometimes

dispatches 50 or more bills — the titles begin to sound the same and the subjects become hard to distinguish.

It's easy to get lost in thought and miss a whole series of little bills.

Delegates scramble to the restroom with unseemly haste lest they miss a vote.

The monotony is broken only by the handful of bills that generate debate.

"I'll vote for anything, as long as the next 11 days pass," joked Delegate Raymond Beck, Mont-



gomery County Republican, on Wednesday. "It starts to be beyond the realm of human ability. You take one battle at a time and you're not even worried about the big picture."

Delegates do nearly anything to keep their energy up during the endless sessions.

On Friday, Delegate Clarence Davis, Baltimore Democrat, called over a page and pointed him toward the House lounge.

"There's this big jar of candy," he said, gesturing with a seriousness usually reserved for the business of state. "There are these ones with silver wrappers — those are chocolate. Get me two of those and, uh, a peppermint."

Mr. Davis slumped back contentedly as the page hurried off. Noticing the nearby press corps was watching, he flashed one of his trademark grins.

"Looks like we're gonna be here awhile," he said, nodding and working his shoulders like he was warming up for an athletic event. "Besides, gotta get some energy."