

## The lion's last roar

### Former Lieutenant Governor Wilder loses his last legislative fight

By Ken Whitehouse

05-20-2008 8:49 PM —

Love him or hate him, it was sad. Former Lt. Gov. John Wilder on Tuesday night lost his last battle in the state legislature.

At issue was what has been dubbed the "Tennessee Plan," the system that determined how judges were selected in Tennessee. Candidates for the state Supreme Court as well as its appellate, chancery and circuit courts would go through a system of being whittled down by the Tennessee Judicial Selection Commission to three nominees and then selected by the governor.



John Wilder

Wilder was the biggest advocate for sustaining the process, which has come under fire for multiple reasons. Some opponents wanted more conservative judges and some wanted more diversity on the bench, while others were dissatisfied with who was on the commission.

Regardless, the votes Wilder was seeking weren't there. Starting in July 2009, Tennessee judges will be selected in a new way – one that has yet to be determined. The Tennessee Plan is now entering a one-year "wind-down" period.

Tuesday, **Wilder appealed** to old colleagues like State Sen. Rusty Crowe, a Republican from Johnson City who began his career as a Democrat and switched allegiances in the Republican landslide of 1994. Wilder also appealed to Republicans who had supported him the past, like Knoxville State Sen. Jamie Woodson – to no avail.

In the end, his request for the Tennessee Plan to survive was done in by a procedural vote requested by another old ally, Republican Randy McNally of Knoxville. Wilder wanted to bypass the committee

system to approve the plan and McNally objected. The Senate concurred.

Ironically, the votes that cost him the most were those of Rosalind Kurita and Mike Williams. Kurita is the Clarksville Democrat who shocked the state by voting for current Lt. Gov. Ron Ramsey, a Republican, over Wilder at the beginning of this legislative session. Williams is the former Republican turned independent who had provided the difference for Wilder so many times in years past.

There is a possibility that the Tennessee Plan could survive, but that is very remote. For now, it looks as though one of the biggest issues the 2009 edition of the Tennessee General Assembly will take up is the judicial selection process.

Either way, the lion has roared for **the last time** after almost 50 years in office. John Wilder will have left the Tennessee State Senate.



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