

# Police and mayor's race

## Brzeczek quits; move seen as boost for Epton

By David Axelrod  
and Philip Wattley

**POLICE SUPT.** Richard Brzeczek's abrupt resignation Tuesday was being read by some in Harold Washington's camp as a move designed to boost the chances of Bernard Epton, the Republican candidate in the April 12 election.

Although some Epton supporters agreed that the resignation could help Epton, strategists on both sides were not convinced that the surprise announcement would make a major difference in the campaign.

Brzeczek, a frequent Washington target, formally announced that the day the next mayor takes office he will step down as the city's top cop to join the Loop law firm of Levy & Erens.

Friends and associates of Brzeczek said his announcement that he would leave his post was a personal decision and not politically motivated. They said he was simply weary of being at the center of the maelstrom stirred by the campaign.

**BUT OTHERS SAW** the timing of the

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Police Supt. Richard Brzeczek

• Police Supt. Richard Brzeczek's resignation intensifies the department's bitter rift over the mayoral election. Page 18.

• Brzeczek's goal was to run the police department like a business. Page 18.

• The 8 city wards with the largest increases in voter registration are predominately black. Page 14.

# Brzeczek

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resignation as a calculated move to influence the campaign. Washington had vowed to fire Brzeczek; Epton, who has garnered strong support from the city's 13,000 police officers, had taken a wait-and-see posture on the police superintendent's future.

"This is an underhanded attempt to help Epton," said Ald. Danny Davis [29th], one of Washington's key supporters. "Brzeczek is hoping to stir up whites even more by saying, 'Washington is about to win, therefore I'm going.'"

Other Washington supporters charged that the timing of Brzeczek's announcement, which came one week before election day, was designed to focus attention on the police as an issue and the fact that the new mayor will appoint the next police superintendent.

"The police issue has become a code word for race," said another Washington supporter. "Some whites worry about what will happen to the police department under a black mayor. Epton has used this issue to rally white support, and Brzeczek just moved it to the front burner."

**ONE REPUBLICAN** statigist agreed that the police chief's resignation could be a help to Epton.

"Now Washington is going to be asked to address the whole issue of the department, and a new superintendent, and that could be a help," he said, theorizing that such a debate could lead to more votes among whites for Epton.

Brzeczek, who once warned that the streets would not be safe under a Washington administration, made no overtly partisan statements in the written statement he released before leaving town on business Tuesday.

He did make a reference to the campaign, explaining that he wanted to remove himself as an issue.

"The position of superintendent of police, the police department and, to a certain extent, I personally have been drawn into the political debate during the present campaign," he said.

"**WHILE THIS** is not without precedent either locally or nationally, I feel that the candidates will now be free to direct themselves to the issues of crime and public safety rather than to any personalities."

Washington used his opposition to Brzeczek to his advantage during the Democratic primary campaign. His declaration that "Brzeczek must go!" helped galvanize the black community, where disenchantment with the police department runs high, with charges of brutality and misconduct.

Brzeczek, appointed three years ago by Mayor Jane Byrne, vowed after the Feb. 22 primary to quit

before Washington could fire him.

Washington's initial reaction to the news of Brzeczek's resignation was, "Best wishes."

**EPTON, WHOSE** brother Saul is a member of the board that oversees the police department, said Tuesday that Brzeczek was "never an issue with me."

"I was perfectly willing to wait and see about him, as I am with all [city] department heads," he said, during an afternoon campaign stop.

In his resignation statement, Brzeczek said, "I will make myself available to the incoming mayor, whoever he may be, to assist in the transition period."

Brzeczek had been rumored to be a potential candidate for Cook County state's attorney next year. But he said in a television interview Tuesday that he would not run, adding, with a trace of bitterness, that he had no plans to return to public life.

After releasing his statement, Brzeczek left the city for the FBI Academy at Quantico, Va., where he was to address new FBI agents undergoing training Tuesday night.

**BRZECZEK, 40,** became the city's youngest police superintendent when he was appointed by Byrne in January, 1980, her third appointment of a superintendent in a year.

The superintendent, who now earns \$85,000 a year, reportedly will be paid an annual salary in six figures with Levy & Erens, a mid-size firm with a good reputation in corporate and trial law.

Washington promised early in his campaign to fire Brzeczek if he were elected. Brzeczek had appeared in a controversial television commercial promoting Byrne's candidacy before the Feb. 22 primary. Two days after that primary, Brzeczek was quoted as saying the city would not be safe under Washington.

That remark brought criticism not only from Washington but also from Epton, who said he was "appalled."

**AFTER LEARNING** of Brzeczek's resignation, Epton said he "would look to deputy superintendents and to input from my transition team" in selecting a new superintendent.

Top police brass had praise for Brzeczek Tuesday. "As far as I'm concerned, it's a sad day for the city of Chicago. Without question, he's the best we've seen," Chief of Detectives William Hanhardt said.

Reaction from the rank and file was mixed. Two black officers interviewed at Wentworth Area headquarters, Sgt. Maurice Sykes and Patrolman Lance Wrightsell, saw Brzeczek's resignation as a good thing.

**WHITE OFFICERS** at Belmont Area headquarters expressed regret and anger at Brzeczek's departure.

"I think it's a shame," said officer Tony Ortolano. "I feel he had an absolute right to voice his opinion," he said, referring to Brzeczek's commercial for Byrne.