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Editorial Board

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Why talk about deal? O'Rourke may stay

Some Westchester County political leaders are dealing for control of the selection process that would play out if a mid-term successor is needed to replace County Executive Andrew P. O'Rourke.

That possibility was raised when Sen. Alfonse D'Amato recommended O'Rourke for a federal judgeship. It is a possibility that grows increasingly improbable with each passing disclosure of O'Rourke's maladministration of county government.

If a man cannot competently administer county government, can he be entrusted with the responsibilities of judicial office?

That is a question that must weigh heavily within the Bush administration. If O'Rourke's name should be reported out nonetheless, then the Senate Judiciary Committee will be asking the same question.

Given the almost certain answer, the deal-making most likely is moot.

There is no questioning O'Rourke's personal integrity, but he abides a much lower standard in those who report to him. He puts too much trust in appointed subordinates, and confuses personal loyalty with professional competence.

If O'Rourke's handling of county

government has not in fact been incompetent, it surely has been inattentive. He did not notice that his aide-de-camp, Roger Biagi, was lurching lavishly at taxpayer expense. When he was asked to sign papers enriching Public Safety Commissioner Anthony Mosca, he evidently did not read what he was signing, an \$85,000 oversight. He set rules for picking a hospital

commissioner, then blatantly ignored those rules.

It does not describe a pattern of fitness for the federal bench. A judge, too, assumes certain administrative obligations demanding priority attention. A

judge, too, relies on aides, especially a law clerk for research and writing, and must not confuse loyalty with competence. And a judge, especially, must subscribe to a strict adherence to the rules.

We supported O'Rourke each time he ran for county office, and urged him into the race when he hesitated before announcing a bid for re-election in 1989. But looking at O'Rourke's performance now with objectivity, it is clear he has not produced up to expectations.

Perhaps he has been distracted by the judicial possibility.

Given the uncertainty now of a nomination to the bench, O'Rourke should refocus his attention on the job he was elected to do.

His handling of Mosca pension might interest U.S. senators.

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