

Gilligan, a Democrat, to Choose Saxbe Successor

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COLUMBUS, Ohio, Nov. 1—Confirmation of William B. Saxbe as United States Attorney General would present a variety of options for Ohio Gov. John J. Gilligan, a Democrat, and produce a major headache for the Ohio Republican party.

A leading option for Mr. Gilligan would be to select as Mr. Saxbe's successor someone who would receive the backing of the state Democratic organization in next year's Senate campaign—presumably Howard M. Metzenbaum, a Cleveland millionaire-businessman.

A former astronaut, John H. Glenn Jr., another leading Ohio Democrat, has been all but ruled out because of his attack on the Governor and the state party last month in which he accused them of "bossism" and "blackmail" in attempting to arrange a Senate endorsement for Mr. Metzenbaum.

Another option would be the

appointment of a "caretaker" Senator who would retire at the end of Senator Saxbe's term next year and not seek the office for himself.

Democratic party sources say this option would have substantial appeal for the Governor because it would permit him and the state party to repudiate the "bossism" charges and stay clear of next spring's anticipated Glenn-Metzenbaum primary fight.

Names of a number of potential "caretakers" are being mentioned by Ohio Democrats. They include Frank W. King, president of the Ohio American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations, whose selection would mend a number of Mr. Gilligan's fences with organized labor in Ohio, and former Gov. Michael V. DiSalle, a Washington lawyer.

Governor Gilligan has approached the matter of succession with considerable caution.

Until today, his only public statements have been to describe it as "a grave constitutional responsibility" and to say the options would not be explored thoroughly until after a formal announcement by the White House.

Meanwhile, the most severe sting for Ohio Republicans is the prospect of losing a United States Senate seat to a Democrat by default.

A secondary sting would be the loss of Mr. Saxbe, clearly the state party's most popular figure, to the Nixon Administration.

'74 Campaigning Sought

Mr. Saxbe had already caused considerable distress in the party by announcing that he would not seek re-election next year. But G.O.P. leaders had been counting on him to campaign heavily in Ohio for the 1974 state ticket, especially for former Gov. James A. Rhodes, the expected Republican gubernatorial candidate.

Mr. Saxbe's nomination also would appear to put to an end modest efforts by a handful of Ohio G.O.P. leaders to talk Mr. Rhodes out of his 1974 gubernatorial candidacy and give way to Mr. Saxbe.

Their reasoning, which is shared by a number of the party's more influential leaders and borne out by a number of state polls, has been that Mr. Saxbe would be a more formidable candidate next year against Mr. Gilligan.

The only comfort to G.O.P. leaders — and admittedly a long-range one — is that Mr. Saxbe's stint as Attorney General, assuming he is confirmed and that his stewardship is successful, will enhance his stature as a potential candidate for Governor in 1978.

Mr. Saxbe has told a number of his friends in the party that he has no intention of getting in Mr. Rhodes's way in 1974 but that 1978 will be another matter.