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# Democrats will hold convention on same date as GOP

By Shelley Batts

Times-Dispatch Staff Writer

The Democratic state central committee decided yesterday that the party's 1982 U.S. Senate candidate will be chosen at a convention in Roanoke June 4-5.

The June 4-5 date means the Democrats will be choosing their Senate nominee the same weekend as state Republicans and will mark the first time in modern Virginia political history that the two parties have held conventions at the same time.

But few members of the Democratic committee — its dominant mood was euphoric because of the party's sweep of the three statewide offices last month — expressed concern about the conflict of dates with the Republicans, who will stage their convention in Richmond.

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The euphoria also was reflected in the standing ovations and cheers that greeted Gov.-elect Charles S. Robb and his running mates, Lt. Gov.-elect Richard J. Davis and Attorney General-elect Gerald L. Ballew. Each made a short thank-you speech and envisioned the leadership Democrats, who had not elected a governor since 1946, would provide Virginia.

And the euphoria was reflected when James S. Crenins, a Richmond railroad lawyer who is state party treasurer and who ordinarily speaks in conservative tones, gave not a financial report but a rousing post-election pep talk. Democrats, Crenins said, are a "vital force" again.

But the euphoria was coupled with uncertainty over whom the 1982 Democratic Senate nominee will be and whether he will be able to maintain the party as Crenins' "vital force."

Not surprisingly, committee members talked in small groups of prospective candidates, some of whom were present at yesterday's meeting. Among those there who have been mentioned as possible candidates were former Attorney General Andrew P. Miller, a narrow loser in 1978 to Sen. John W. Warner, and state Sens. Hunter B. Andrews of Hampton and Joseph V. Garlan Jr. of Fairfax. And Del. Owen B. Pickett of Virginia Beach was there in his role as state party chairman.

But the man who emerged as the favorite of many of the

committee members was one who was not there — former Sen. William B. Spong Jr., who is dean of the College of William and Mary's Marshall-Wythe law school and who has not returned phone calls from reporters wanting to ask if he would consider running.

Spong was the winner of an unscientific, informal poll of committee members who were asked to name their top three choices for the Senate nomination.

Votes were weighted on a 3-2-1 point basis and Spong had 137 points. Trailing him were Miller (118), Andrews (96) and Pickett (81).

Spong served one term in the Senate and was defeated in 1972 by former Sen. William L. Scott, in part because of poor campaign organization and because he was victim of one of the nation's first negative media advertising campaigns.

A possible Spong candidacy reportedly also received warm support at a Friday night meeting of a broad range of white and black party leaders. The meeting drew national committee-

men, state party officers, General Assembly members and at least two congressional district chairmen, Angus H. Maccaulay of the 3rd and Robert Crouch of the 5th.

There also were expressions of backing for Pickett, who was viewed as a man who would be able, as Robb did, to command support from the state's financial establishment.

One source denied that the meeting had been designed to launch a stop-Miller movement. But another source said that some at the meeting talked of Miller, who also was a narrow loser to Henry Howell in the divisive 1977 gubernatorial primary, as a "man who has had his chances."

Crouch acted as official spokesman for those who attended the meeting. His only comment on what was discussed was "we talked about everybody who has been mentioned by the Great Monitor." Crouch said the group will meet again in January, with its goal being to achieve party unity behind what it perceives to be the strongest.

A search for party unity was the reason Democrats, who

traditionally have chosen candidates in a primary, will name their 1982 Senate candidate at a convention. The Democrats' first convention to name a Senate candidate in more than 100 decades was in 1978 when Miller was nominated.

In voting to hold the 1982 convention in Roanoke, the general committee endorsed a recommendation by the Democratic steering committee, which met yesterday morning. A proposal by a smattering of Northern Virginia central committee members to hold a primary was rejected by a voice vote.

The steering committee briefly considered a May 21-22 convention, but abandoned that idea because, one of its members said later, "almost every college and high school in Virginia is holding graduation that weekend."

In other action, the central committee approved the addition of a representative of the Democratic Black Caucus to the policy-making steering committee. The move was urged as a means of recognizing the overwhelming black support for Robb, Davis and Ballew.