

**Divided House Democrats re-elected their leaders to minority party positions in the next Congress, choosing Reps. Nancy Pelosi as leader and Steny H. Hoyer as whip.**

Perhaps appropriately, given Maryland's status as an island of Democratic blue in a widening sea of Republican red, the state can lay claim to fully half of the top six members of the incoming leadership team.

Pelosi was born in Baltimore, and Hoyer represents the southern part of the state.

A sixth member, Rep. Chris Van Hollen, represents Maryland's Washington suburbs. The Montgomery County lawmaker will become the top Democrat on the House Budget Committee, which Pelosi has apparently chosen to designate as a leadership position. Van Hollen was part of the tableau of party officials who spoke briefly with reporters after the election.

It is not clear that all other Democrats will choose to recognize the distinction. Rep. Donna Edwards of Maryland, did not mention Van Hollen, whose district is next to hers, in a statement praising the five other leaders by name.

Also on Wednesday, Republicans selected Rep. John A. Boehner of Ohio as their leader without opposition, meaning he will become speaker. Eric Cantor of Virginia retains the second-ranking party position and will be majority leader.

Hoyer ran unopposed for the No. 2 Democratic position after Pelosi headed off a potential challenge for that job by Rep. Jim Clyburn of South Carolina, the highest-ranking African-American in Congress. Clyburn was first to announce his candidacy for whip, which Hoyer chose to pursue after Pelosi chose to remain as Democratic leader.

Last weekend, Pelosi worked out a deal to give Clyburn a new post, assistant leader, which she made part of the leadership. He then dropped his bid for whip.

Hoyer, at a news conference after the vote, fumbled Clyburn's new title, calling him "assistant to the leader."

"Assistant leader," Pelosi swiftly corrected him.

Hoyer called this month's midterm vote "a very difficult election, to say the least." Democrats lost more than 60 House seats and have fallen to their lowest ebb in the chamber since the 1940s.

Asked why Democrats chose to re-elect the same leadership team after receiving a drubbing from the voters, Pelosi defended herself and her colleagues. She blamed the defeat largely on the nation's 9.6 percent unemployment rate, calling it a "very tough screen" to reach voters through.

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