

Lautenberg
Sweeney

suggested that, among other things, the merger was a backroom deal designed to

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ident Stephen M. Sweeney
ption in response to U.S.
Lautenberg's criticism of the
of Rowan University and
the immediate and not
etation was that it was the
his potential primary
ncumbent senator.

the opening Lautenberg gave
what he sees as the merits
benefit of the merger to the
community, Sweeney
the signatures of two dozen
legislative colleagues and fired
personal letter characterizing
comments as "bizarre and

Sweeney's long-time guidance
South Jersey political power,
ross, took equally personal
Lautenberg after the senator

president — the bitterness and harsh personal tone of the exchange between Lautenberg and Sweeney may have opened a chasm too wide to bridge.

It is telling that none of Lautenberg's House colleagues rose to his defense. Democratic county chairs and acknowledged party leaders remained silent as well.

Normally, the state chairman would intervene and attempt to dial down the rhetoric and negotiate a truce, but the heavyweight personalities involved in this fight appear to be beyond the control or persuasion of Chairman John Wisniewski.

The end game may be a concerted effort to persuade Lautenberg to retire when his current term ends in 2014 by warning that a serious and well-funded primary challenge awaits him and that he'll not enjoy the kind of broad-based party support that enabled
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