

Editorial & Opinion

The time is now for Md.'s senators

Viewpoint

Democrats will take control of the U.S. Senate next week, following Vermont Sen. James M. Jeffords' decision to leave the Republican Party and become an Independent.

Few — if any — states stand to benefit more from the switch than Maryland.

Both of Maryland's representatives in the upper chamber, Barbara A. Mikulski and Paul S. Sarbanes, are Democrats; as such, both will rise to positions of real power.

Sarbanes, the state's senior member, will displace Phil Gramm, R-Texas, as chairman of the Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs, the group that oversees the nation's banking and financial services industries, among other things.

What might we expect from a Chairman Sarbanes? Earlier this year, the 68-year-old senator introduced the Financial Information Privacy Protection Act of 2001, legislation designed to empower people to block the sale and trading of their financial information.

Also this year, Sar-

banes joined Gramm and others in the introduction of the Export Administration Act, which provides the president with the authority to control exports for reasons of national security and foreign policy.

Meanwhile, Mikulski, 64, will take over as chairman of both the Appropriations Subcommittee on Veterans, Housing and Independent Agencies, which holds the

purse strings to \$85 billion, and the

HELP Subcommittee on Aging.

Mikulski, Baltimore City's favorite daughter, is well known for her advocacy on behalf of better housing and better lives for the state's and nation's elderly.

"As the chairman of these subcommittees," Mikulski said recently, "I'll be better able to fight for the day-to-day needs of Marylanders and the long-term needs of our nation."

The same can be said for Sarbanes. As a chairman, he will have appreciably more power to fight for Maryland and its residents. All Marylanders should demand that both members make good on their newfound leverage.

State residents have been resolutely loyal to both senators, sending Sarbanes to five consecutive six-year terms, Mikulski to three. While we realize that their power is not unchecked, not with Republicans in control of the White House and the House of Representatives, we do expect results.

The time is now. As Jeffords' surprise defection made perfectly clear, the pols we send to Washington cannot — should not — take for granted that there will be even one more opportunity to go to war on our behalf as a member of the majority.

