

Blount holding off challenge by Boston

**Bitterly contested race
featured challenge to
Blount's legal home**

By ERIC SIEGEL
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State Sen. Clarence W. Blount, the West Baltimore Democrat known as "the conscience of the Senate," last night appeared to be withstanding a challenge by Del. Frank D. Boston Jr. in a bitter race marked by Boston's legal attempts to prove that the Senate majority leader didn't live in his district.

With about 25 percent of the precincts counted, Blount, who was first elected to the state Senate in 1970, had 67 percent of the vote to 31 percent for Boston.

A third candidate, Gregory Truitt, had 2 percent.

In another closely watched Democratic primary race, this one for the seat held until January by ousted state Sen. Larry Young, Del. Clarence M. Mitchell IV, a member of one of the city's most prominent political families, had 55 percent of the vote to 45 percent for John D. Jefferies.

Jefferies, a former state delegate, was appointed by the 44th District's Democratic State Central Committee to fill out the remainder of Young's term after Young was expelled by his colleagues for ethics violations.

The primary election in the city was marked by voter lethargy and the introduction of computerized voting machines.

Election officials put the city turnout at about 29 percent — about what they had predicted. Even in districts with some of the more hotly contested races, at many polling places the campaign workers, clad in brightly colored T-shirts and hawking voting cards and leaflets, greatly outnumbered the voters for much of the day.

"People didn't show up. They had no interest in this election,"

said city elections chief Barbara E. Jackson.

The new voting machines — put in place to replace the crank-and-lever system that had been in place for years in the wake of criticism after the 1994 election — worked well in the field.

Voters and precinct judges gave the new system, which cost \$6.5 million, high marks.

"I like the new machines fine. They're very easy for me," said Shirley Cosby Huffnine, 60, a retiree, after she voted yesterday afternoon at the Forest Park Library in West Baltimore.

But election officials seemed hard-pressed to meet their prediction that they would have complete results by 10 p.m. — hours earlier than in the past.

As of 9:45 p.m., officials had tabulated only about a fifth of the votes cast.

In the 41st District, Boston's bold challenge to Blount, a seven-term legislator and near-icon in West Baltimore, grew even more bitter in August, when Boston charged in a lawsuit that Blount actually lived in Pikesville and said the Northwest apartment he listed as his address was nothing more than a mail drop.

But this month, the state's highest court ruled that Blount's name could remain on the ballot, reversing a lower-court ruling that said there was "overwhelming" evidence that Blount did not live in his district.

In the 44th District, Mitchell, who was elected to the House four years ago, was seeking the Senate seat once held by his father, Clarence M. Mitchell III, and uncle Michael B. Mitchell.

Besides Blount and Jefferies, only two of the city's other six Democratic state senators faced a primary opponent.

In East Baltimore's 45th, Sen. Nathaniel J. McFadden had 83 percent of the vote, with three challengers splitting the remaining 17 percent, with nearly half the precincts reporting.

In Northwest's 42nd, Sen. Barbara A. Hoffman, chairwoman of the influential Budget and Taxation Committee, had 88 percent of the votes in early tabulations, compared with 12 percent for Elinor Hoffman Kerpelman, a first-time candidate.

Sens. Ralph M. Hughes from the Westside's 40th District, Joan Carter Conway from Northeast's 43rd, Perry Sfikas in Southeast's 46th and George W. Della Jr. in South Baltimore's 47th had no primary opponents.

On the Republican side, the only contested primary for state senator — or delegate, for that matter — was in the 47th.

With Democrats outnumbering Republicans in the city by more than 8-to-1, success in the Democratic primary is tantamount to victory in the general election.

Indeed, besides Della, the only other Baltimore state senator to face a Republican challenger in November is Hughes, who is being opposed by Melvin E. Stubbs. Conway faces an independent challenge by Nimrod Westcott Jr.

Among the most hotly contested House races in the Democratic primary, community activist Pat Gorman was running a close fourth to three incumbents in the 43rd in early balloting.

With a third of the precincts reporting, Gorman had 20 percent of the vote, compared with Del. Kenneth C. Montague Jr.'s 26 percent; Del. Michael V. Dobson's 24 percent and Del. Ann Marie Doory's 23 percent.

Sun staff writers Stephen Henderson and Jamie Stiehm contributed to this article.