

MARYLAND

Blount's retiring termed big 'loss'

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ANNAPOLIS (AP) — Gov. Parris N. Glendening yesterday praised the leadership of longtime state Sen. Clarence Blount, who has announced his retirement after 32 years in the Maryland General Assembly.

"This is a tremendous loss for the Senate, for the city of Baltimore and for the state of Maryland," Mr. Glendening said in a statement. "He has been a tireless advocate for the families and children of Baltimore and all of Maryland and has been a role model for legislators throughout his career."

Mr. Blount, Baltimore Democrat, announced his retirement Friday in Annapolis.

Mr. Blount, who has served as Senate majority leader since 1983, praised his colleagues and talked about how good it would be to spend time with his family.

The 81-year-old lawmaker went from a sharecropper's farm in North Carolina to the battlefields of Europe to the inner circle of leadership of the Maryland Senate.

"It's been a mission," he said. "I'm very glad that it's over. I'm beginning to feel relieved."

Mr. Blount's decision was widely expected. It means Baltimore will lose a powerful protector of its interests in Annapolis.

Mr. Blount has been one of the four lawmakers — and the only black legislator — to head a Senate standing committee.

In that role he has been a staunch ally of the governor, pushing through major legislation on the environment, minority business and education with only minor alterations.

Mr. Blount arrived in Baltimore when he was 8 — illiterate and unable to count to 10. He entered first grade at 10 and graduated from Douglass High School at 21.

Soon after he entered Morgan State College in 1941, Mr. Blount was drafted.

He spent four years in the segregated Army during World War II and earned a battlefield commission and citations for valor with the 92nd Infantry Division.

Mr. Blount won election to the Senate in 1970.

He said he takes pride in his accomplishments in education, which he described as "my No. 1 thought."

It was his impassioned speech that in 1997 helped seal approval of a controversial \$250 million plan for restructuring of the Baltimore school system.

He also said he is proud of his record in minority business affairs. He helped pass Mr. Glendening's increases in the state's goals for minority participation in contracting.