

Walter Baker seeks another state Senate term

• 36th District senator is going for sixth term **6-22-98**

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CHESTERTOWN — Walter Baker, the influential chairman of the Judicial Proceedings Committee, is seeking his sixth Senate term for Maryland's 36th District — an area of the state he knows quite well.

Born and raised on a farm in Cecil County, he is now the senior legislator for all of rural Maryland. A consistent and leading champion of Eastern Shore interests, Baker has spoken out loud and clear when he believed urban problems were getting more attention than those on the countryside.

The 70-year-old senator majored in political science at Washington College here, and continued on to the University of Maryland Law School before receiving his bachelor's degree.

"In 1950, when the old man put lights on the tractor, I knew it was time to leave the farm," he said.

Baker, a no-nonsense Democrat, has always preached that it is not only important to craft new laws, but to make sure that bad legislation does not pass through the General Assembly. In his two decades of service, he has helped to kill proposals that hurt business and the economy, or were careless giveaways of the taxpayers' money.

Baker is a major sponsor of legislation in the General Assembly. His committee, Judicial Proceedings, generally handles many more bills than any of the four Senate committees. The senator was named chairman of the JPR committee by Senate president Thomas V. Mike Miller in 1987. Since then, Baker has been a key member of the Senate leadership team. He has served on critical task forces in the judicial field that have studied and made recommendations on correctional rehabilitation, taxes, and insanity defense as well as general procedures of the court system.

An outspoken fiscal conservative Democrat with libertarian leanings, Baker has finished his 20th year with remarkable legislative victories in this past session such as the Right to Farm bill and new laws to protect children. He was also praised by the business community for sponsoring legislation that clarified commercial law over supposed abandoned property, eliminating a major financial headache.

In line with his own philosophy of personal responsibility, Baker has continued to shape tougher laws that assure child support by parents, particularly "deadbeat" fathers. He led the way a year ago in a major overhaul of the entire structure of child support legislation.

Later this month, the Foster Care Review Board will honor the senator for his efforts to streamline the adoption process. "The main object is to recognize the rights of the child," he said.

Sparked by the recent outbreaks of violence in schools around the country, Baker's agenda also includes a strong emphasis on what he has termed the "juvenile problem."

"The shootings and bomb threats have got to stop," Baker said.

Baker believes that parents should be held more accountable for the actions of their children. "The parents are with their kids every day," he said.

Baker advocates financial and penal penalties for the parents of children who are found guilty of such crimes.

"I would prefer to pass some law where the penalty would make parents more responsible for their children," Baker said. "You can't tell me that parents don't know what their kids are doing."