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HEADLINE: Madden has big head start on challenger

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BODY:

There was a time when some Republicans and Democrats believed GOP Sen. Martin G. Madden might get re-elected by default this year. Amazingly, no opponent surfaced until recent weeks in what has traditionally been a Democratic district, stretching from southern Howard County into northern Prince George's County.

Now a Democrat, local party activist Raymond Rankin of Columbia, is running against Madden. But the incumbent has a big head start. He has been knocking on constituents' doors for more than a year under the assumption that he would have opposition. And as one of the few Republicans with a leadership role in the Democratic-controlled Senate, Madden has accomplishments to trumpet.

"I have a record, proven record, of leadership," said Madden, who will formally announce his re-election bid at 1 p.m. today at Lake Elkhorn in Columbia. "Citizens want elected officials to work together. I think my record reflects I've been successfully able to do that."

Madden's most prominent role has been as chairman of the Senate's subcommittee on welfare reform, shepherding what he calls compassionate legislation that has helped reduce welfare rolls by 47 percent statewide and 74 percent in Howard County.

The senator also has garnered some of the rewards of incumbency. Endorsements from the teachers union and the Maryland Chamber of Commerce give him credentials on education and business issues, and an award this year from the Maryland League of Conservation voters stamps him as a strong environmentalist.

Madden is known for paying close attention to constituents. He started a program challenging elementary school students to go without television for 10 days, and he has worked with communities on local issues such as preserving the Smith farm in Columbia.

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