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HEADLINE: Madden takes challenge seriously; State Senate race pits savvy campaigner against underfinanced newcomer

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BODY:

Standing along Route 216 near Interstate 95 early one morning last week, Sen. Martin G. Madden got a chance to put his years of campaigning in Howard County to good use.

Holding a warm cup of coffee in his left hand, the Republican senator from Clarksville used his right hand to wave at motorists. He wants their votes in the election Nov. 3 against Democratic challenger Raymond N. Rankin.

"Good morning, thank you," Madden whispers to those who wave back.

"This kind of campaigning doesn't cost anything but a few hours of sleep," said the senator born and raised in Prince George's County. "You can't just come out here and wave once. You have to come out here six or seven times."

Until a couple of months ago, Madden, who represents District 13 in the Maryland General Assembly, faced no Democratic opposition in what has traditionally been a Democratic district stretching from southern Howard County into northern Prince George's County. In late July, Rankin, a local party activist from Columbia, entered the race.

Rankin, 36, who serves on the Democratic Central Committee, acknowledges that he's an underdog. He has never held elected office, has had difficulty raising funds and is virtually unknown throughout the district.

"I am at a disadvantage," said Rankin, sitting in the Howard County Democratic headquarters this week. "I have not been able to raise as much money as Marty, and I just recently got signs."

Less than two weeks before the election, Rankin said he'll concentrate on gaining name recognition and funds. So far, he has raised only \$ 3,000, compared with nearly \$ 50,000 by Madden.

Rankin moved to Howard County in 1991, and is a maintenance employee in the Anne Arundel County public schools. He will begin a new job Monday as a computer-support technician for the Anne Arundel schools. He attends Howard County Community College part time, where he is majoring in computer-support technology.

His campaign has been focused on reaching out to blue-collar workers in the district, many of whom reside in the North Laurel and Savage area and are struggling to make ends meet.

"Marty's record on labor relations is not very good," said Rankin, who is a member of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees. "A good labor record will improve the quality of life for the residents in the district."

He also has criticized Madden's record on domestic violence, health care and education. "As a father of two, I am concerned because I know that day care can

be as expensive as paying on a mortgage," he said. "So many people can't afford quality child care."

Madden, 49, who is known for paying close attention to his constituents, clearly has an edge over Rankin, but the senator says he's taking the challenge seriously. "You can never take anything for granted," he said. "There is no substitute for meeting people face to face."

Madden's introduction to state politics was 12 years ago, when he ran for state delegate in District 13B and lost by 500 votes. He ran for the seat in 1990 and won. In 1994, he set his sights on the Senate and urged Del. John S. Morgan to join the ticket. They are running again as a team.

Madden doesn't hesitate to outline his accomplishments. As chairman of the Senate's subcommittee on welfare reform, he said, he spearheaded what he calls "compassionate legislation" that helped reduce welfare rolls by 47 percent statewide and 74 percent in Howard County.

"The goal, of course, is to bring people to self-sufficiency as soon as possible," Madden said. "Once people find work, they can aggressively climb the economic ladder, but you've got to first get the person into a job."

Madden has gained responsibilities in the Senate and has been a mentor to younger Republican colleagues and those seeking office.

"Marty has been a good friend and a great teacher," said Hans K. Meeder, a GOP candidate for delegate in District 13A who owns an education consulting firm. "He has done a lot for the party."

He has been praised by Republicans and Democrats for his ability to transcend party politics.

"I like Marty," said Democrat John Giannetti, who is facing Morgan in District 13B. "He's a great person who gets things done in Annapolis, and I hope to be working with him come Nov. 3."

During a campaign stop at the monthly meeting of the Laurel Friendship Club at Phelps Senior Citizens Center, Madden shook hands with seniors and asked for their support.

Loyal Democratic voter Priscilla Vereneau of Laurel told Madden that she will split her ticket this election and vote for him.

"It kills me to go against the Democrats," Vereneau said. "But Marty is always looking out for us senior citizens, and I'll vote for him this time."

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GRAPHIC: PHOTO 1, SUN STAFF : 1994, Republican: "There is no substitute for meeting people face to face," says Sen. Martin G. Madden.; PHOTO 2, KARL MERTON FERRON : SUN STAFF, Democrat: "I have not been able to raise as much money as Marty, and I just recently got signs," says Raymond N. Rankin.

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