

Political scion Madden makes name for himself

By JAMES M. CORAM
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Given his political bloodlines, it is not surprising that Martin Gerard Madden is making a name for himself in Annapolis after only one year of representing Howard County in the state Senate.

The grandson of prominent Democrats, the 46-year-old Clarksville Republican is a member of the powerful Senate Finance Committee and chairman of the Welfare Subcommittee — rare accomplishments for a freshman senator, much less a member of the minority.

Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller Jr. calls Mr. Madden "a conscientious, hard-working senator who responds to the problems and needs of the legislature."

It was that ability — not politics — that led Finance Committee Chairman Thomas L. Bromwell to make Mr. Madden chairman of the Welfare Subcommittee, Mr. Bromwell said.

"He's a fair, even-minded guy, and he's been a major player in welfare reform in this state," said Mr. Bromwell.

Mr. Madden's centrist, coalition-building style is in sharp contrast to the uncompromising stance of many current Republican freshmen in Congress.

'He's extremely aggressive'

Some state conservatives — such as GOP Del. John S. Morgan of Laurel, who campaigned successfully with Mr. Madden for the House of Delegates in 1986 — wince at some of the senator's positions, such as his staunch support for gun control.

"He's extremely aggressive in what he believes in," Mr. Morgan said. "And he thinks [gun control] is necessary to control crime."

But Mr. Madden has no intention of relegating himself to the margins of politics for the sake of ideological purity.

"The role of volunteer grenade throwers [adopted by some members of the minority party] is a legitimate role — but it is not a role I have chosen to assume," said Mr. Madden, who will begin his second session in the Senate when the General Assembly opens Wednesday.

"I try very hard to be a consensus builder," he said.

Many a Democrat would covet his political ancestry. One of his grandfathers, George Tracy, is credited with having delivered upstate New York to Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1932. The other, Martin J. Madden, was sergeant-at-arms for the U.S. Senate in the 63rd Congress, which took office in 1913.

Mementos from both grandfathers adorn Mr. Madden's office. Standing in front of his desk is a mace — an ornamental staff that was used as a symbol of authority when the U.S. Senate was in session. It was given to his grandfather when he left the Senate and is engraved with the names of then-members of Congress.

Party switch

Atop Mr. Madden's desk is a small anvil given to his other grandfather in Kinderhook, N.Y., for building the coalition for FDR. Mr. Madden notes that Kinderhook was the home of Martin Van Buren, the eighth president and founder of the modern Democratic Party.

Like Van Buren, who switched from the Democratic to the Free-Soil Party and ran a losing campaign for president in 1848, Mr. Madden also abandoned the Democrats, joining the Republicans on Jan. 7, 1986.

The switch was motivated "by fiscal issues more than anything else," he said. "I thought we [as a nation] were moving more and more away from personal responsibility and trying to solve things with money. It was a philosophy I disagreed with."

Shortly afterward, he told the chairman of the Howard County Republican Central Committee that he would like to run for a seat in the House of Delegates. In those days, Democrats held every elected office in Howard County except for a seat in the House of Delegates. The Republicans welcomed Mr. Madden and his candidacy with open arms.

As a teen-ager at DeMatha High School in Hyattsville, Mr. Madden set a record for door-to-door candy sales, selling three times as much as any other student. As a political campaigner, he

uses the same kind of salesmanship.

"Going door to door, you sometimes get the door slammed in your face," he said. "It happened only once [in 1994]. The guy knew my view, didn't like it and, boom! But mostly, if you're considerate of people's time, they appreciate the fact that you dropped by."

Comeback

After a narrow loss in 1986, Mr. Madden "knocked on 10,000 doors" in preparation for his 1990 House of Delegates run. He invited Mr. Morgan — then a 26-year-old physicist making his first try for office — to run with him.

When Mr. Madden beat two incumbents — including Robert J. DiPietro, former mayor of Laurel and a protege of then-Gov. William Donald Schaefer — it was only a mild surprise, given his strong showing four years earlier. Mr. Morgan's victory was more surprising.

The twin victories established Mr. Madden as a political power in Howard County — so much so that local Democrats persuaded the governor to redraw Mr. Madden's district after the 1990 Census in such a way that he lost two-thirds of his previous district.

Mr. Madden, who owns a Prince George's County insurance company begun by his late father, solved that problem by running for a Senate seat that included most of his previous district. Shortly before the 1994 election, he announced that he would not seek re-election to the House, but would seek the Senate seat held by Democrat Thomas M. Yeager of Fulton, a three-term incumbent.

Mr. Yeager was beaten in the primary by Virginia M. Thomas, a powerful east Columbia Democrat who had served three terms in the House of Delegates. To most observers, Ms. Thomas appeared invincible.

But Mr. Madden scored a political coup when he defeated Mr. Yeager crossed party lines to endorse him rather than Ms. Thomas — support that Mr. Madden proudly noted in a flier sent to voters a week before the election.

The flier also took a swipe at Ms. Thomas, portraying her as a guest of lobbyists at an Orioles game, enjoying for free what ordinary people have to pay for. Mr. Madden prides himself on shunning even a free cup of coffee from lobbyists.

He beat Ms. Thomas by fewer than 500 votes.

Working with the majority

Since that bitter campaign, Mr. Madden has forged a good working relationship with members of the majority party.

Democratic State Sen. Larry Young of Baltimore serves with Mr. Madden on the Senate Finance Committee and is chairman of the Health Subcommittee of which Mr. Madden is a member.

Mr. Young said the Clarksville Republican "struggles with trying to be a conservative," but cannot get rid of his "moderate, progressive streak."

That trait, said Mr. Young, enabled an 11-member Finance Committee of conservatives, moderates and liberals like himself to vote unanimously for a welfare bill crafted by Mr. Madden's subcommittee last year.

A listener

Even a staunch conservative such as Mr. Morgan believes that Mr. Madden is on the right track. When his conservative GOP colleagues accuse Mr. Madden of "being weak on the Republican agenda," they do so "unfairly," Mr. Morgan said.

Although many say that Mr. Madden has moderate to liberal leanings — he was endorsed by the Sierra Club in the last election — "conservatives still like him as a person," Mr. Morgan said. "He always spends time listening to what they have to say."

Mr. Madden said he has no desire for higher office. He is content to play his position — something he learned in high school when he was "13th or 14th man" on a DeMatha basketball team that beat a New York City team led by a phenomenon named Lew Alcindor, who became the all-star pro Kareem Abdul-Jabbar.

But Ms. Athen said she wouldn't be surprised if Mr. Madden changed his mind about higher office.

"He has incredible political savvy," she said. "If he wants something he will go after it. And he will not stop short of getting what he wants."