

Md. Delegate to Resign Over Ethics Investigation

Curran's Dealings With University in Question

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Under investigation for possible ethics violations, Del. Gerald J. Curran (D-Baltimore) announced yesterday that he would resign from the General Assembly even though he said that he had done nothing improper.

With his resignation, effective at 1 p.m. today, Curran will become the second Maryland lawmaker to leave office during a legislative session that has become dominated by allegations of ethics violations. In January, the Senate expelled Sen. Larry Young (D-Baltimore) after the Joint Committee on Legislative Ethics concluded that he had used his office to further his personal business.

An insurance broker by trade, Curran was being investigated by the Joint Committee on Legislative Ethics after allegations, first reported in the Baltimore Sun, that he used his influence with state officials to help win lucrative insurance business for himself through the University of Maryland.

"I feel very strongly that I have done nothing improper in my pursuit of my profession as an insurance broker in my dealings with the University of Maryland System . . ." Curran said in a two-page letter to House Speaker Casper R. Taylor Jr. (D-Allegany). "I believe that I have not violated any of our ethics rules and have disclosed all matters required of me."

Curran, a member of the legislative leadership, spent several years lobbying state officials for the chance to provide a payroll deduction system for employees to use to pay for car and house insurance. After initial opposition from university officials, Curran met with then-Gov. William Donald Schaefer (D) and Comptroller Louis L. Goldstein (D) to press his case.

The university then reconsidered its opposition and approved a contract for the payroll deduction after a bidding procedure in which Curran represented both of the insurance companies that sought the work. He stands to make tens of thousands of dollars in the arrangement.

After the Sun's initial story, Curran stepped down as chairman of the House Commerce and Government Matters Committee and the joint ethics committee began its investigation.

Curran's letter termed his leaving the House a "retirement," but a letter from the chairmen of the ethics committee called his departure a "resignation." The lawmaker left Annapolis before his letter became public, and a woman who answered the phone at his Baltimore home said he was not there and would not accept messages.

Given Curran's resignation, the ethics committee recommended halting its investigation and that the General Assembly take no further action on the allegations.

After two hours of closed-door meetings by members of the ethics committee, Taylor said during a brief meeting with reporters that he would not comment until a news conference tomorrow. Lawmakers have grown especially sensitive to the ethics allegations being raised this session. With two of their own leaving office in the space of two months, legislators have grown uneasy about what some feel is a new standard of scrutiny for them. Several have said that they feel the ethics rules are changing in ways they don't understand.

"You're waiting to see what comes next in the next newspaper article," said Del. Nancy K. Kopp (D-Montgomery).

In his letter, Curran said he had consulted two lawyers regarding the legal requirements of disclosing his insurance deal and said they told him no disclosure was necessary. The deal was signed in May, and just before this session, Curran filed what he termed a "voluntary disclosure." He said that disclosure "became the basis for the current media frenzy suggesting impropriety on my part; without that disclosure, there would have been no newspaper story."

Staffwriter Charles Babington
contributed to this report.