



SUN STAFF

Gerald J. Curran
submits letter of resignation after 32 years.

Del. Curran quits; ethics probe ends

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Long legislative career
ended by investigation
of business dealings

He denies any wrongdoing

Md. House is spared
turmoil of potential
disciplinary action

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SUN STAFF

Del. Gerald J. Curran submitted his resignation from the Maryland House of Delegates yesterday, ending a 32-year legislative career under the cloud of an ethics probe into his business dealings.

In a poignant letter to House Speaker Casper R. Taylor Jr., Curran denied that he had violated any ethics laws and said he was leaving to protect his health and to spare his family further stress.

"For my entire career as a legislator I have never used the influence of my office for personal gain," Curran wrote. "I am sorry the end of my service to this body had to come this way but — as we know — we must all endure hard times in this life."

Curran's decision — following what he called a "media frenzy" about his business activities — spares the House from having to consider disciplining a longtime legislator, as the Senate did last month.

In a wrenching vote on Jan. 16, senators expelled Larry Young after concluding that he had used the prestige of his legislative office to benefit his personal businesses.

Curran, a Northeast Baltimore Democrat and member of one of Maryland's most prominent political families, did not respond to requests for comment.

He was expected to make what will likely be an emotional farewell speech on the floor of the House today. His resignation is to take effect at 1 p.m.

Curran, 58, a Towson-based insurance broker, was due to appear Monday before the General Assembly's Joint Committee on Legislative Ethics to defend some of the insurance arrangements he has entered into in recent years.

The committee's investigation was launched this month after *The Sun* reported that [See Curran, 6A]

Del. Curran resigns, ending House ethics probe

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Curran developed potentially lucrative arrangements with state offices and private enterprises with issues pending before the legislature.

"After receiving Curran's resignation letter, the ethics committee voted late yesterday to end its investigation, and Taylor and Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller said they agreed.

"The Joint Committee appreciates that any further action in this inquiry would be a difficult, time-consuming process for all members of the General Assembly," the committee's co-chairs said in a letter sent last night to Taylor and Miller.

"The Joint Committee therefore concludes that it would be in the public interest for this inquiry to be terminated upon Delegate Curran's resignation."

Taylor, a close friend of Curran's, credited him with making "a tough decision."

"Delegate Curran has a very high regard for the institution he has spent 32 years in," said Taylor, a Cumberland Democrat. "He also has a very high regard for the family he loves. When you put it together, that's how he came to his decision."

In one case being scrutinized by the ethics panel, Curran pushed for seven years to establish an insurance program for the University System of Maryland's 30,000 employees. He sought help from his contacts in state government, including then-Gov. William Donald Schaefer and Comptroller Louis L. Goldstein, the newspaper reported.

When the program was finally approved, Curran served as the broker for the winning bidder. That arrangement, which he reported to the ethics committee, could net him tens of thousands of dollars in broker's fees.

Documents obtained by *The Sun* this week further described

how Curran pressed state officials to cut through red tape that stood in the way of the program.

Curran "did make it clear that this insurance program ... was probably the biggest single deal that he handled as an insurance agent and that it was very important to him," Gerald I. Langbaum, an assistant attorney general, wrote in a memo describing a conversation with the delegate.

In a second case, *The Sun* reported that Curran, who headed a House committee that considers legislation vital to credit unions, was the broker in an arrangement between an insurance company and a subsidiary of the state's largest credit union.

The Sun has since learned that Curran actually became an unpaid officer of a subsidiary of the credit union as part of the deal to sell auto and homeowners insurance to its 180,000 members.

Last June, he became assistant secretary of Security Financial Corp., a wholly owned subsidiary of the State Employees Credit Union Inc., as part of an agreement to split his insurance broker's fee with the company.

He did not disclose that arrangement to the ethics committee.

In another deal, the paper reported, Curran also did not disclose that he was the broker for an insurance deal with the University of Maryland Medical System — a private company that receives millions of dollars in state assistance annually.

While Maryland law does not prohibit the state's part-time legislators from doing business with companies that have issues before the Assembly, it does require them to disclose potential conflicts of interest.

Curran temporarily stepped aside Feb. 10 as chairman of the House Committee on Commerce and Government Matters after the articles raised questions



LINDA COAN : SUN STAFF

Statement: From left, Jervis S. Finney, Sen. Mike Collins, Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller, House Speaker Casper R. Taylor Jr. and Del. Kenneth Montague speak to the press about the resignation of Del. Gerald J. Curran.

about possible ethical breaches in his insurance work.

For the past two weeks, Curran has scarcely appeared in the State House or the House office building, and colleagues have said that he was deeply wounded by the newspaper articles and subsequent investigation.

The stress of the ethics investigation had been plain on his face the last two weeks, and he was taken to an Annapolis hospital once after complaining of chest pains and an elevated heart rate.

Some confidants had urged Curran to resign rather than go through a painful ethics probe and possible punishment by the full House of Delegates.

Some family members and others, meanwhile, wanted him to fight through the ethics inquiry, sources said.

Members of the ethics committee remained tight-lipped throughout about possible viola-

tions of the ethics law.

But Jervis S. Finney, a former federal prosecutor who was hired as independent counsel to lead the Curran investigation, suggested that the matter before the committee was a serious one.

"The joint committee already has shown its ability to act — and act decisively and responsibly — on whatever facts come before it," Finney said this week. "To assume otherwise would be a big mistake."

Curran said in his letter to Taylor that the ethics investigation "has been the most stressful event in my life and the decision I am making today is in consideration of my health and family."

He has complained to some legislators that he would not be able to get fair treatment from the ethics committee in the wake of the forceful action taken last month in the Young matter.

Curran made clear his unhappiness with the ethics committee process.

"You should also know that the procedure under which the Joint Committee on Legislative Ethics is operating could be much improved upon to give the accused some semblance of due process," Curran wrote.

"I think what he did was courageous, and I support him in making his decision," said Nevett Steele Jr., a Towson lawyer hired by Curran. "I think it was in the best interest of everyone involved, including the legislature."

Miller said Curran had spared the Assembly more ethics-related "turmoil."

"I salute him for doing what was best and honorable," said Miller, a Prince George's Democrat.

A spokesman for Gov. Parris N.

Curran's letter of resignation

Here is the text of Del. Gerald J. Curran's letter to Speaker Casper R. Taylor Jr., resigning from the Maryland House of Delegates:

Dear Speaker Taylor:

Please accept my retirement from the Maryland House of Delegates effective Friday, February 27, 1998 at 1:00 p.m.

I want to thank you and all the members present and past for the wonderful thirty-one years of past service. I have worked with the most dedicated and talented people one could ever meet. I will always have many fond memories of these years of service.

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 and, to my knowledge, no one has suggested that I had. I believe that I have not violated any of our ethics rules and have disclosed all matters required of me. For my entire career as a legislator, I have never used the influence of my office for personal gain.

The sad irony of my present situation results from the following:

1. I consulted with two separate lawyers concerning the legal requirements of our ethics laws.
2. I was advised that the disclosure of the insurance program with the University of Maryland System was appropriate even though it had been the subject of a public competitive bid; both lawyers advised that no further disclosure was required.
3. Prior to this legislative session, I had disclosed that insurance program.
4. This voluntary disclosure on my part became the basis for the current media frenzy suggesting impropriety on my part; without that disclosure, there would have been no newspaper story. I simply don't know what else I could or should have done.

The fact is that I am a man of modest means and this limits my ability to resist further the allegations brought against me.

I think you should also know that the procedure under which the Joint Committee on Legislative Ethics is operating could be much improved upon to give the accused some semblance of due process, such as, the right to call witnesses, the right to review the committee files before the hearing, and other rights consistent with fairness.

Next year, I will reach the age of sixty and some knew of my plans not to seek re-election in 1998. The time has come sooner than I had planned. I am sorry the end of my service to this body had to come this way but — as we know — we must all endure hard times in this life.

I know I will be remembered fondly by many of my colleagues, staff and friends who have shown their affection and care in prayers for my family and me during this trying time. I know, too, that I will be remembered well by hundreds of persons whom I have been able to help through the years in my capacity as a legislator.

I should also share with you that this has been the most stressful event in my life and the decision I am making today is in consideration of my health and family. As hard and as hurtful as this has been on me and my family, I find great peace and satisfaction in a public life well served.

You may be assured that you and your good work will always be in my prayers. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Gerald J. Curran

Glendening said he "wishes the delegate well."

The five-member Democratic State Central Committee in Curran's 43rd legislative district will choose someone to fill the vacancy. By law, the governor is obliged to appoint the committee's nominee to the House.

Pat Gorman, a member of the central committee who had planned to run for a House seat this year, said last night that she will be a candidate to serve out the remainder of Curran's term.

Sun staff writer Joanna Daemmrich contributed to this article.