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tricts. Closer to Baltimore, key races include Republican Del. Kenneth Holt's challenge of state Sen. Michael J. Collins in eastern Baltimore County and Republican David P. Maier's rematch with Sen. Edward J. Kasemeyer in Howard and Baltimore counties.

Polls will close at 8 p.m. after the last voters in line have cast ballots. As results arrive, they will be posted on the state elections board's Web site at www.elections.state.md.us.

Sun staff writers Thomas W. Waldron and Greg Garland contributed to this article.

Curran defeats Rappaport, wins unprecedented 4th term

He campaigned on record
as consumer advocate and
foe of tobacco industry

By MICHAEL DRESSER

SUN STAFF 11.4.98

Democrat J. Joseph Curran Jr. won an unprecedented fourth term as Maryland's attorney general yesterday as he cruised to a comfortable victory over Republican Paul H. Rappaport.

With voting in 84 percent of the state's precincts tallied, Curran led Rappaport by a nearly 2-1 margin.

Curran easily defeated the underfinanced Rappaport after a campaign that took place in the shadow of the most expensive governor's campaign in Maryland history.

By winning, Curran continues a remarkable run of electoral success dating to his election to the House of Delegates in 1958.

The veteran Baltimore politician also became the first Maryland attorney general to win a fourth term since it became an elective office in 1864, breaking the three-term record of Francis Burch, who served from 1966 to 1978. Curran's tenure in the office will be second only to that of Lu-

ther Barton, who served from 1778 to 1805 — when the job was an appointive position.

Rappaport, 64, waged an aggressive campaign but had a hard time overcoming his late start in the race. He entered his candidacy July 2 — four days before the filing deadline — after Ellen R. Sauerbrey decided not to offer him a chance to repeat his 1994 role as her running mate. He won the Republican nomination by default because no other GOP candidate filed.

As of Oct. 18, the deadline for the last campaign finance report, Curran had raised \$379,287 — not a huge figure for a statewide race, but more than enough to eclipse Rappaport's \$58,104.

The Republican based his campaign against Curran mostly on crime issues. A former state police major and Howard County police chief, Rappaport charged that the incumbent attorney general had bungled or frustrated several investigations and failed to act energetically against drug distributors.

Rappaport's campaign received a boost last month when he revealed unreleased state police data showing drastic declines in the amount of illegal drugs being seized by troopers patrolling Interstate 95. He attributed the drop to a loss of confidence among

troopers that Curran's office would adequately defend them if they were sued by a minority group member in a search-and-seizure case.

But the publicity about that issue was not enough to overcome Curran's track record as a consumer advocate and a foe of the tobacco industry.

His office is suing large tobacco companies on behalf of the state for recovery of the Medicaid costs of smoking-related illnesses — an initiative that Rappaport promised without enthusiasm to continue.

Curran's re-election ensures that there will be no major changes in the state's strategy for handling that case.

As the numbers piled up for his opponent shortly before 10 p.m., Rappaport conceded the race at close to 11 p.m. He said he had no "visions of grandeur" and knew all along he would have problems in the race.

"I had only four months to go from ground zero," Rappaport said. "Considering no money, no time, no organization, I think we did fabulous."