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## Incumbency Factor Favors Cummings

2 Challenging Longtime Lawmaker

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U.S. Rep. Elijah E. Cummings has had a high profile statewide for the last few months, first as one of presidential candidate Sen. Barack Obama's Maryland campaign co-chairmen, then as an outspoken opponent of the first draft of the \$700 billion financial bailout.

Now, he's focusing more of his energies at home in Maryland's 7th Congressional District, as he campaigns for reelection in a contest that most observers expect to be another easy win for Cummings (D). Challenging Cummings, 57, on Nov. 4 are Republican Michael T. Hargadon, 57, of Woodstock, a dentist, and Libertarian Ronald M. Owens-Bey, 59, of Baltimore, a social worker.

The district is a study in contrasts. It includes some of Baltimore's poorest and most troubled areas, but also takes in much of affluent Howard County. After serving 14 years in the Maryland House of Delegates, Cummings was elected to the congressional seat in 1996 to replace Kweisi Mfume, who became head of the NAACP. Cummings has built a reputation as a critic of the Bush administration, and has a keen interest in social issues including education, drug treatment and health care.

In a recent interview, Cummings said being in the majority party this term, for the first time since he came to Congress, has been a welcome change.

But even with Democrats in the majority, Cummings said, frustrations remain. He cited the battle over expanding health insurance for children as one example; Congress passed the legislation only to have President Bush veto it.

While the legislative situation has "gotten better, it could be better" with a new Democratic administration in place, he said.

In recent weeks, the financial crisis has consumed most of Cummings's attention. Earlier this month, he blasted AIG insurance company executives for holding a pricey retreat at a Southern California hotel days after the company received an \$85 billion federal bailout to keep operations afloat. AIG's plans for a second retreat at a Ritz Carlton in Northern California were scuttled after the public outcry.

"I cannot fathom how in the same day, the very same day that AIG asked the government for another \$37.8 billion loan, the company would even consider moving forward with plans to host another large conference at another luxury resort," he said in a statement at the time. "Any company that is taking money from my neighbor in Baltimore whose home is about to be foreclosed or from the woman two blocks over who is working three jobs just to support her children should take every measure necessary to ensure that there is not even an appearance of excessive corporate spending."

Cummings was one of 95 House Democrats who rejected the initial bailout plan proposed by Treasury Secretary Henry M. Paulson Jr. in late September. Ultimately, he voted in favor of the follow-up legislation after receiving reassurances that the needs of ordinary citizens would not be ignored. "The alternative was that if we did nothing, it would be worse," he said.

Hargadon, who was an ardent supporter of Libertarian-leaning U.S. Rep. Ron Paul (R-Tex.) during the Republican presidential primaries, said his goal in office would be to reduce the federal government's role in health care and education, giving states more authority to make decisions.

He favors phasing out Social Security and Medicare, and said Congress has made a huge mistake by intervening in the current financial crisis. "The more the government interferes, the more problems we're going to have," he said.

One of the reasons Owens-Bey decided to run is that "Congressman Cummings is an establishment personality. He's a career politician.

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"We're not getting what we need in the city of Baltimore," he said. "My pet peeve is education. With all the African American leadership, why haven't we changed the system around?"

As of the end of September, Hargadon raised about \$17,000 for his campaign, according to Opensecrets.org. Cummings reported raising about \$797,000 as of Oct. 15, according to the Federal Election Commission.

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