



ANDRE LAMBERTSON: SUN STAFF

Endorsement: At a news conference, state Del. Elijah E. Cummings, who represents West Baltimore, announces that the Eastside Democratic Organization is backing him for the 7th District seat in Congress.

Cummings backed for 7th District

By WILLIAM F. ZORZI JR.
SUN STAFF

Del. Elijah E. Cummings, a West Baltimore legislator, picked up the first major organizational endorsement in the campaign for the 7th District congressional seat yesterday and locked up part of the important Eastside vote in the process.

Mr. Cummings, speaker pro tem of the House of Delegates, won the endorsement of state Sen. Nathaniel J. McFadden, who withdrew from the race and pledged the support of his Eastside Democratic Organization (EDO), as reported yesterday in late editions of *The Sun*.

Mr. Cummings, 44, announced the endorsement at a news conference, flanked by elected officials who are EDO members, a former legislator from northwest Baltimore County and members of Baltimore's Orthodox Jewish community.

The show of support from across the diverse 7th District played to an emerging theme of Mr. Cummings' campaign, that of his being a "bridge builder."

It also was intended to show his strength as a contender among the 30 other candidates in the March 5 primary race for the seat being vacated by Rep. Kweisi Mfume, who is leaving Congress to become the head of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

"I'm going to give it everything I've got," Mr. Cummings said.

Mr. McFadden said that after "careful consideration," and recommendations from other members of his political organization, he was supporting Mr. Cummings because he would "bridge an artificial barrier ... that has separated East and West too long."

Support from the EDO, which in the past two years has rediscovered some of its former strength as a political organization, is the first major endorsement in the race.

It means that Mr. Cummings, whose political base is in West Baltimore, can count on organized support on the Eastside and minimize the possibility of splitting the vote.

The EDO endorsement "brings two City Council people, two members of the House, members

of the Central Committee and all the forces we can muster," Mr. McFadden said, referring to City Council members Robert L. Douglass and Paula Johnson Branch, state Dels. Hattie N. Harrison and Talmadge Branch. All were present at Mr. Cummings' law offices yesterday.

State Del. Clarence "Tiger" Davis, from Mr. McFadden's 45th District, also is a candidate for Mr. Mfume's seat and will draw on the Eastside vote.

One candidate who was unimpressed with Mr. Cummings' endorsement was West Baltimore lawyer A. Dwight Pettit, who lost in a nine-way race to Mr. Mfume in 1986, when the congressman won the seat.

Asked if he believed the EDO endorsement would deliver the Eastside vote to Mr. Cummings, Mr. Pettit said, "No. Tiger Davis is still in the race, and I see the East still as being very splintered."

Mr. Pettit, whose campaign was the first this week to begin advertising on television and radio, is not unaware of the importance of the Eastside vote. He said one of his first campaign promises was to put a district office in East Baltimore.

Of the effectiveness of the EDO, he said, "They have an ability to cover the polls [on election day], but I don't see them as having any ability to deliver any kind of a bloc vote."

While Mr. Cummings did speak briefly, the focus of the new conference was the supporters who surrounded him and offered testimonials to his abilities as a legislator.

One unexpected visitor was state Del. Alfred W. Redmer Jr., a Republican from eastern Baltimore County — an area that lies in the 2nd Congressional District.

Mr. Redmer said he was not there to endorse Mr. Cummings, but only stopped in to wish him well. "I like the way he does business," he said.

In an effort to show support in the heavily Jewish Northwest section of the district, former Del. Leon Albin, a Baltimore County Democrat, spoke, as did Solomon D. Lax, of the city's Orthodox community in Park Heights.

Although the 7th District is nearly 75 percent black, votes from the Jewish community in Northwest Baltimore and Baltimore County could become a factor in the this race — particularly given the number of candidates.