

Suburban Newsline

Currie, Unopposed Again, Still Getting the Message Out

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For the third straight election season, Democratic Sen. Ulysses Currie is running unopposed for the district that stretches from Lake Arbor to Suitland to Clinton, including communities such as Kettering, Capitol Heights and District Heights.

But just because he doesn't have an opponent to focus on doesn't mean that there isn't work to be done, or controversy and adversity to overcome.

"There's always work to be done," said Currie. "It may not be intense, but we still try to get the information out there."

A former educator, Currie, 65, said he prides himself on fighting for additional funds for education and school construction in his district. In the last legislative session, four education bills that he cosponsored passed, dealing with adult education and literacy services, equivalent access for students with disabilities and negotiations between public school employers and employee organizations.

"Senator Currie is task-oriented and a follow-through senator," wrote Prince George's Board of Education Chair Beatrice Tignor in an e-mail, citing his efforts for increased funding.

Currie is one of nine state senators who represent Prince George's County, the richest predominately black county in the nation, yet one where the average SAT score of 879 is 141 points lower than both the national and state average. In contrast, Montgomery County's average score was 1095, while Fairfax County's was 1096.

Included in Currie's district is Forestville High School, which this year converted into one of the country's few public military schools. Despite a 30-point gain this year, Forestville's average score is still only 793.

Vice Chair of the Board of Education Howard W. Stone said that significant progress cannot be made without repealing TRIM (Tax Relief in Maryland), the property tax cap that he said severely limits the tax revenue available for education.

In addition to education, much of Currie's work revolves around equal opportunity and minority business interests, important subjects in a district in which 81 percent of the 107,781 residents are black.

This summer he and three other prominent black senators urged a boycott of Democratic gubernatorial nominee Kathleen Kennedy Townsend over her selection of a white running mate, although Currie said, "It was never a boycott. We supported her all along."

"We asked her to sit down and talk about things regarding Prince George's County, so we could go back to our constituents and tell them what they could expect from the Townsend administration," said Currie after Townsend agreed to hire more educators and construct more state office buildings in the county.

Currie cited "basic quality of life for seniors" as one of his main agendas, including lowering the cost of prescription drugs. He cosponsored the gun safety and gun accountability acts this year, which would have established increased firearms purchasing requirements and penalties for irresponsible use, but they failed.

In addition to being a deputy majority whip in the Senate, he is the chairman of the Transportation, Public Safety and Environment subcommittee as well as a member of the Budget and Taxation and Capital Budget committees.

In 1992, he became the first African American to preside over the Maryland House of Delegates. Since his election to the Senate in 1994, he has been opposed in the primaries twice and never in the general election. Registered Democrats outnumber Republicans by a ratio of 12-to-1 in the district.

"Normally in the 25th, if you're going to have opposition, it will be in the primary," said Currie. "We just don't have any active Republicans in the district."

The Friends of Ulysses Currie raised \$267,072 as of Oct. 25, according to his report on file with the State Board of Elections.

Born in Whiteville, N.C., Currie received his master's degree from American University in 1968 after spending four years in the Army. He is married and has two children.