

## THE DAILY RECORD

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## EDITORIAL

## Currie censure falls short

**T**he state Senate has labored mightily and slapped one of its own on the wrist.

By a unanimous vote, the Senate censured Sen. Ulysses Currie, D-Prince George's, last Friday for ethics violations in connection with his failure to disclose work performed for a grocery store chain that brought him about \$250,000. It was the Senate's first such action in 14 years.

In an orchestrated display of contrition, Mr. Currie apologized to his Senate colleagues — a move suggested in the report by the Joint Committee on Legislative Ethics.

"I will not stand here and make excuses. I am a person with flaws and I do have weaknesses. I never intended to do anything that would bring dishonor to you, my wife or me," he said. "I am deeply sorry that I did so and promise that I will never do so again."

He also joined his colleagues in voting to censure himself.

Touching.

Yes, there were other sanctions. Mr. Currie was removed "immediately and permanently" from the Senate Democratic leadership roster.

But he retained his seat on the powerful Budget and Taxation Committee. He resigned as chairman of that committee in 2010 when he was indicted on federal charges of conspiracy, bribery, extortion and making false statements.

When he was acquitted of those charges last November, jurors said the trial raised issues of questionable ethics and conflicts of interest by Mr. Currie, but they did not rise to the level of a criminal conviction.

The legislative ethics committee also recommended that Mr. Currie not serve on conference committees, which are appointed by the presiding officers of the House and Senate to reconcile differences in legislation passed by both houses.

Not so fast on that one, said Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller Jr.

"If it's a matter involving his district or a subject matter which only he had unique knowledge of, you know, the members of the House or Senate would welcome him on a conference committee," Miller said.

So this is the punishment for the man, who, in the words of the ethics committee report: "... eroded the confidence and trust of the people and other governmental leaders who work with legislators, and ... brought dishonor upon the institution."

This is hardly surprising. Mr. Currie is a long-time senator and political ally of Mr. Miller who paid his dues and worked his way up through the legislative leadership ranks. Current and former state legislators, two members of Congress and a former governor testified as character witnesses at his trial.

So the Senate did the absolute minimum it had to do to preserve a shred of respectability. Our vote, as we said in this space in December, was for expulsion.

On top of that, all of the ethics committee's sessions in the Currie case, including his testimony, were conducted behind closed doors.

While that is legal — the panel is exempt from the state's open meetings law when it considers disciplinary action against a lawmaker — such secrecy is not required.

Three-fourths of the committee members could have voted to open the hearings, or Mr. Currie could have asked that they be open.

"If the General Assembly wants the public to have faith and credibility in the process, the best way to do that is to shine a bright light on it," said Maryland Common Cause Executive Director Susan Wichmann.

That's a lesson these legislators still need to learn.