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Stone sees his career revived

Affected in remapping, longtime senator now has no opposition in district; 'A really trying time'

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Sen. Norman R. Stone Jr., the Dundalk Democrat whose district had been targeted for elimination by Gov. Parris N. Glendening, was all but re-elected last night when the candidate filing deadline passed with no one opposing him.

Maryland's longest-serving state lawmaker appears certain of returning to Annapolis in January for his 11th four-year term -- a remarkable turn for a politician whose career appeared on the brink of ending less than a month ago.

"This has been a really trying time for a lot of people," said Stone, 66, who was first elected to the Senate in 1966 after serving one term in the House of Delegates. "Nobody knew where they were going to be. We thought it was wrong from the very beginning."

The passage of last night's filing deadline for General Assembly candidates found six of 47 incumbent senators with no opposition, including two Republicans.

In addition to Stone, they include John J. Hafer, a Western Maryland Republican; Robert H. Kittleman, a Howard County Republican; Ida G. Ruben, a Montgomery County Democrat; Philip C. Jimeno, an Anne Arundel Democrat; and Joan Carter Conway, a Baltimore Democrat.

It also became clear last night that Maryland's once-a-decade redistricting process will make for some tough political fights this summer and fall, particularly in Baltimore.

Last month, the state's highest court rejected Glendening's redistricting plan and drew up its own map -- eliminating districts shared by the city and Baltimore County and throwing together some incumbents.

Sen. Clarence M. Mitchell IV almost escaped a challenge, but Del. Verna L. Jones filed yesterday to run against him for the 44th District Senate seat.

Jones announced her candidacy at an afternoon news conference at Martha's Place, a women's recovery and treatment center on Pennsylvania Avenue in West Baltimore, as a few dozen supporters chanted "We want Verna."

In a statement aimed at her opponent, Jones said the district needs leadership that works for the community rather than riding on the legacy of a family name. Mitchell is a member of the prominent Baltimore civil rights family that has been a mainstay in city and state politics.

"It's so important that Baltimore City is able to send to Annapolis on its behalf six strong senators," Jones said. "This is not about me. It's about rebuilding the 44th District."

The race between Jones and Mitchell is one of three hotly contested Senate primaries in Baltimore.

Sen. Barbara A. Hoffman, who was placed in the 41st District by the court's new map, is being challenged by one-term Del. Lisa A. Gladden. Many African-American political leaders are backing Gladden, who is black, over Hoffman, who is white. Hoffman is the chairwoman of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee.

Because the new 41st District is 70 percent black, some political leaders said they believe a black candidate should fill the seat from which Sen. Clarence W. Blount, the longest-serving African-American in the legislature, is retiring.

In southern and southeastern Baltimore, Sens. Perry Sfikas and George W. Della Jr. are fighting for the 46th District Senate seat after Della's district was merged with the 46th by the court.

Former delegate and television newscaster Curt Anderson filed yesterday to return to Annapolis, seeking a delegate's seat in North Baltimore's 43rd district.

The new court-drawn districts prompted some to move, including incumbent Del. James W. Campbell, who has represented Baltimore's 42nd District, and challenger Matthew Joseph.

Both lived in the city in homes that, under the new map, are in the 41st District. Both chose to find apartments in Baltimore County to run in the new 42nd -- where about a third of the old 42nd was assigned by the court.

"I already represent a portion of that district, so it wasn't too hard of a decision to move," Campbell said yesterday.

Both Campbell and Joseph said the challenge was time. They had little more than a week after the court's decision to decide where they wanted to run and find a new place to live.

For Stone, a lawyer who has represented Dundalk for four decades in the Assembly, moving wasn't an option.

His district had been split up by Glendening's redistricting proposal, and his home was in one of two precincts the governor had attached to an Anne Arundel County district -- which effectively would have forced Stone into involuntary political retirement.

Critics say Stone was targeted because he voted against the governor and the Democratic leadership on some high-profile issues.

Three years ago, he angered Glendening by blocking a gay rights measure in committee. The legislation passed the next year after Stone was switched to a different committee.

"I try to vote the way I feel my constituents want me to vote," Stone said yesterday. "Sometimes, that's the positions of the governor and the leadership. Sometimes, it isn't. But I've been there a long time. ... I'm not going to change now."

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