

## Cash may be king, but getting votes is key

### Campaign filings spotlight Dem, GOP strengths and weaknesses

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ANNAPOLIS — Several closely watched legislative races came into clearer focus this week as campaign finance filings revealed some vulnerable incumbents in a dogfight and others facing a deep hole.

The numbers also show where the Republicans and Democrats are likely to pour their resources.

One of the most financially competitive races is playing out in northeast Baltimore County, where Republican Craig Borne, a 33-year-old disabilities attorney with the state Department of Transportation, is challenging Sen. Katherine A. Klausmeier (D-Dist. 8) of Perry Hall. But first, Borne must get past fellow Republican Cal Clemons of Perry Hall, who reported raising \$1,500.

Borne, a first-time candidate from Perry Hall, has raised more than \$85,000 this year and boasts almost \$64,000 in the bank. Klausmeier has only \$720 more on hand than Borne. Klausmeier did not return calls.

“I would imagine that it’s got to concern the incumbent that our numbers are that close,” Borne said. “After 12 years [in the General Assembly], you’d think that she could put up better numbers.”

Borne is one of several GOP candidates who have received large sums from a Republican-backed treasury that appears to be aimed at targeted districts. The Support Our Governor Slate Committee has given four-figure donations to Borne and other state Senate candidates — Richard I. Martel Jr. (District 12), Bill Askinazi (District 15), Ron Miller (District 27), Thomas F. McKay (District 29), Jon Vandenneuvel (District 32), Douglas B. Riley (District 42) and Keith Losoya (District 46).

The slate also gave \$10,000 to Del. Herbert H. McMillan (R-Dist. 30) of Annapolis, who is seeking to unseat Sen. John C. Astle (D-Dist. 30) of Annapolis. McMillan is sitting on almost \$69,000, nearly as much as Astle reported on hand.

That level of financial support has bolstered GOP efforts to add five senators, which would give Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. (R), a veto-proof chamber if he is re-elected in November.

“I think with an incumbent Republican governor running for re-election, people have gotten their acts together sooner than in the past,” said Kevin Igoe, a GOP strategist whose clients include Borne and McKay.

A challenger with high fund-raising totals at this stage points to someone who has “star quality” or “incumbents who have ... not been doing their homework over the last three-and-a-half years,” Igoe added.

The cost of political campaigns has swelled dramatically in recent elections, partially due to the Republican resurgence fueled by Ehrlich’s 2002 election, said Paul Herrnson, director of the Center for American Politics and Citizenship at the University of Maryland, College Park.

“Maryland is traditionally a one-party state and whoever won the Democratic primary was almost a guaranteed lock,” he said.

The calculus, however, has changed.

Borne interprets his fund-raising success as a sign that Democrats are losing their grip on the voting public. “It shows that the monopoly is still a monopoly in this state, but it’s a weak monopoly and there are chinks in the armor,” he said.

Both Democratic and Republican incumbents now face challengers capable of forcing even veteran lawmakers to be aggressive fund-raisers, said G. Keith Haller, president of Potomac Inc., a Bethesda polling firm. "You can't sit back and rest on your laurels," he said. "... The battle for dollars raised sometimes is a sign of credibility."

One Democrat incumbent being outgunned in fund-raising is Sen. Roy P. Dyson, a veteran politician who is no stranger to elections.

McKay, St. Mary's County Commissioner president, has a more than 3-1 cushion over Dyson (Dist. 29) of Great Mills in a district that has become more conservative in recent years. But Dyson, a conservative Democrat, said shoe-leather campaigning is more effective than high-dollar receptions in his rural district. The ex-congressman said he is not worried that McKay has more than \$115,000 on hand compared to his \$37,000.

"We don't have the cash that they're going to have, but we're putting our heart and soul into this," Dyson said.

That fits Dyson's profile as a "classic retail politico," said Zach Messitte, a political science professor at St. Mary's College of Maryland. "He may not need that much money."

But McKay is not putting too much stock into comparisons between the two campaigns' kitties, either.

"I don't think this campaign is won or lost at this stage with the dollar numbers, but I think what you can tell from this is we have a broad base of support ... and we're going to have the ability to march full speed ahead until the end of the race," he said.

Perhaps more important than how much a candidate raises is how many donors there are, Igoe said.

"In legislative races, the breadth of contributions begin to tell the breadth of support in districts," he said. "You can get outspent and win, but you have to have enough to get your message out. You can't be drowned out and you can't simply rely on grassroots."

Another spotlight race pits Howard County Executive James N. Robey (D) against Sen. Sandra B. Schrader (R-Dist. 13) of Columbia. In what could be one of the more expensive legislative scrums, both candidates have more than \$100,000 on hand. Robey raised \$133,000 this year alone.

"The level of spending for these marginal legislative districts is almost double what it was four years ago if you look at it on average," Haller said.

Senate candidates who expect to mount a serious challenge should raise \$150,000, Igoe said, to afford television advertisements, mailings, polls, phone banks and overhead costs.

"It used to be that somebody did a couple mailings to every single home in the district," he said. "That doesn't cut it anymore."

As the Sept. 12 primary looms, several open seats will take center stage.

One is in District 11, where Del. Robert A. Zirkin and Scott Rifkin, a doctor whose brother is a prominent Annapolis lobbyist, are competing for the Democratic nomination to succeed Sen. Paula C. Hollinger of Owings Mills, who is running for Congress.

Rifkin leads the money race, but Zirkin of Owings Mills is undeterred.

"Door knocking is much more valuable than a piece of mail or ad can ever be," Zirkin said. "That doesn't show up on a campaign finance report."