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News: Off-Campus

The real school of politics

Student joins race for seat on House of Delegates

By Scott Dance

May 11, 2006

College Park resident Jon Black has declared candidacy for a vacant seat in the state's House of Delegates and said he is eager to bring long-term thinking to the General Assembly.

If he's elected, he hopes to make an impact on matters of education, infant health, crime and public transportation.

But if he's elected, it will also mean he'll have to push back his final eight credits at the university until summer 2007.

That's because he's a 21-year-old junior majoring in philosophy.

Black just finished his first session in Annapolis as an aide for Del. Herman Taylor (D-Montgomery) last month, and the experience ignited his interest in state politics, he said. When he saw an opportunity open up with veteran Del. Pauline Menes' retirement from a career of about four decades, he decided to take it and will vie for a seat representing the District 21, which includes College Park, in next fall's elections.

"Toward the end of the session, I thought, 'I really want to do this,'" Black said. When he saw a spot opened up, he thought, "there's no reason not to do it," he said.

Sitting in the South Campus Dining Hall, Black looks like any other student, clad in brown sneakers, jeans and a loose-fitting purple dress shirt with the sleeves rolled up, and with a little stubble on his chin. In front of him sits a yellow legal pad full of notes — not on the philosophy of ethics, but on his platform and goals as a politician.

Black acknowledged some may not take him seriously but said a campaign against experienced older veterans doesn't daunt him.



MIKE FRANTEL—THE
DIAMONDBACK

Jon Black, a junior philosophy major, declared his candidacy for the state House of Delegates.

"Everyone should try to take the initiative to have a say in their government, and I did," he said. "If you talk to me, you'll realize I'm serious about this."

During his session working for Taylor, Black said he got significant hands-on experience helping with legislation regarding birth-defect prevention, drunk driving and energy — "I wasn't just doing the administrative stuff," he said.

Aside from his session in Annapolis, Black got some experience with state government, interning at the state's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene for summer 2004.

A native of Towson and 2003 graduate of Towson High School, Black is also an Eagle Scout, through which he said he learned the importance of pursuing things he cares about.

His campaign, run by his roommate, Rick Gibbs, will focus on his passion for reducing the state's infant mortality rate and beefing up public transportation to cut congestion on roads. His campaign website, www.johnblack.org, will be up by the end of this week, Black said.

The race for Menes' seat is gearing up, as about 10 candidates have expressed interest in running for the seat. Black and College Park resident Mark Cook are the only two who have officially declared candidacy, according to the state elections board's website.

District 4 Councilwoman Joseline Peña-Melnyk and Laurel lawyer Ben Barnes have expressed their intent to run. The deadline to declare candidacy for a state election is July 3.

Barnes showed excitement a student was getting involved.

"It's exciting for young people to get involved in the political process," Barnes said. "I hope he energizes a lot of students to come out and vote."

Black said he hopes to garner the support of students and all residents of the district and is planning to go door-to-door and hold cookouts before the Sept. 12 primary. He currently lives in University View but is moving to a house on 34th Avenue with five friends in the next few weeks.

Black said he hopes voters won't be hung up on the fact that he is a student and inexperienced — "I think my platform will speak for itself," he said.

"I don't think you have to be a government person or a lawyer to have a word," Black said. "Anyone can do this; you just have to have the motivation."

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