

Wednesday, Aug. 4, 2010

Montgomery councilman wants third term to advocate for those in need

Leventhal initiated Housing First and Montgomery Cares initiatives

by Erin Cunningham | Staff Writer

http://www.gazette.net/stories/08042010/montnew182102_32536.php

In his eight years on the Montgomery County Council, George L. Leventhal has been a leading advocate for low-income residents and the uninsured.

If elected to another four-year term, Leventhal, 47, of Takoma Park, said he will continue to be a champion for the county's less-fortunate residents.

"I'm not running for re-election for me," said Leventhal, a Democratic at-large council member.

This year, 26,000 poor and uninsured county residents will receive access to health care due to the Montgomery Cares program, which Leventhal initiated in 2005, he said.

"I'm not confident that if I were not there that that cause would be as high a priority," he said.

Leventhal also helped launch the Housing First initiative in 2008 that provides permanent housing and follow-up social support for homeless residents.

Leventhal is among nine Democrats competing in the Sept. 14 primary election. The general election is Nov. 2. The salary for County Council members is \$94,351.

Leventhal, who is chairman of the council's Health and Human Services Committee, says his top priority in a new term will be to help stabilize the county's economy and attract jobs and investment.

To meet that goal, the county needs to implement recently approved master plans for the Great Seneca Science Corridor — formerly known as Gaithersburg West — and White Flint, he said.

The county also should implement additional master plans that will increase the value of land in transit hubs, such as in the eastern part of the county, he said.

Leventhal also pledges to support a sunset of the new energy tax increase for residential and business customers in 2012. The new rates, adopted by the council this year, are about three times as high for residential customers and double for business customers.

Leventhal says the council must be aggressive in continuing to advocate for public transportation.

If both Gov. Martin O'Malley (D) and President Barack Obama (D) are re-elected — O'Malley this year and Obama in 2012 — Leventhal says ground could be broken on the Purple Line during the next council term.

In response to his challengers who say Leventhal and other council members should have known the economy would decline, he said, "That's easy to say in hindsight.

"In this term, the bottom fell out of the economy around the world, and we are adapting to that change. We're not continuing spending practices of the last decade."

-Residence: Takoma Park

-Age: 47

-Party: Democratic

-Education: Master's in public administration, Johns Hopkins University; bachelor's in English, University of California, Berkeley.

-Work experience: Currently serving second term on Montgomery County Council; served as council president in 2006; formerly served as senior federal relations officer for the Association of American Universities and legislative director to U.S. Sen. Barbara A. Mikulski (D-Md.) of Baltimore. Also worked on the staff of the U.S. Senate Finance Committee and the Maryland General Assembly.

-Family: Married to Soraia P. Leventhal since 1989; two children, Daniel, 15, and Francisco, 11, both in Montgomery County Public Schools.

-Top three issues: Attract jobs and investment to restore a healthy economy; public transportation; and access to health care.

-Campaign funds: \$101,325 (latest available)

-Previous political experience: Served as chairman of the Montgomery County Democratic Central Committee from 1996 to 2001, managed political campaigns for many candidates and ballot questions.

-Other affiliations: Co-chair, Bethesda Green board of directors. Member, Shirat HaNefesh synagogue.

-Website: www.georgeleventhal.com