

Lt. Governor Steele Formally Joins U.S. Senate Race

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Republican Lt. Gov. Michael Steele kicked off his long-anticipated campaign for the U.S. Senate Tuesday, saying he would bridge the rift between the two political parties in Washington and build "consensus on things that matter to families in their everyday lives."

"I believe that even though there is dissension in the halls of Congress, there is consensus in the halls of our churches, our schools, and our workplaces," Steele said. "This consensus on things that matter to families in their everyday lives is where we should focus America's attention."

Steele, the first African American elected to statewide office when he became lieutenant governor in 2002, now wants to become Maryland's first black senator and the first Republican senator in 20 years. He is running to replace Sen. Paul Sarbanes, D-Md., who will not seek re-election next year.

The grandson of a sharecropper and the son of a laundress, Steele was the first in his family to go to college and the first to attend law school, he said. "Don't tell me it can't be done," Steele said.

The state Republican Party had been dropping broad hints of support for Steele's candidacy the last several weeks, and his exploratory committee raised more than \$418,000 in the latest reporting period with the Federal Election Commission.

Although widely regarded as a shoo-in for the Republican nomination, Steele has raised far less than the \$2.1 million collected by Rep. Ben Cardin, D-Baltimore, who is leaving his seat in the 3rd Congressional District to run for the Senate.

Cardin, however, faces at least five other Democrats for his party's nomination. Former Rep. Kweisi Mfume, D-Baltimore, the former head of the NAACP, is the only other African-American candidate beside Steele.

Poll results released Tuesday show in a head-to-head match-up between Cardin and Steele, Cardin would get 47 percent to Steele's 38 percent, with 15 percent of voters undecided, according to Gonzales Research and Marketing Strategies.

If the match-up was between Mfume and Steele, the vote would be more evenly split, with Steele winning 42 percent to Mfume's 40 percent, with 18 percent undecided, according to the poll.

Steele, who lives in Largo, chose Prince George's Community College for his announcement. Thundering drum beats from a 15-piece marchi

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