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HEADLINE: Economy a priority in 37A race

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SALISBURY -- With one candidate riding on his experience and the other touting a fresh, young mind, the political atmosphere in District 37A, which includes Wicomico and Dorchester counties, thickens as the election grows near.

Incumbent Rudy Cane, a Maryland native who has held the seat for 12 years, will face off against Republican Dustin Mills, a 25-year-old from Wisconsin.

Both candidates recognize the importance of agriculture within the district and are running on a platform of fiscal responsibility and job creation. It is the difference in how to achieve these goals, as well as their age and level of experience, that divides them.

Cane said the promotion of small businesses -- the backbone of Maryland, as he describes them -- will yield jobs.

"More money and more employment is generated from small businesses than meets the eye," he said. "We need to encourage small businesses to become very active, and we need to put pressure on the banks to loan them money."

Cane added that a state government cannot operate with high rates of unemployment, as "when you have employment, you get income taxes and that assists in balancing the budget."

One of the reasons Maryland raised its sales tax by a penny, Cane said, is because high unemployment rates yielded low income taxes.

"But even in doing that, we are still one of the cheapest sales tax states in the (country)," he said. "We have to make sacrifices to bring in enough money. I recently took a pay cut and so did many other legislators."

Maryland sales tax of 6 percent matches 10 other states, while 12 states surpass Maryland's rate.

Mills is promoting massive spending and tax cuts to address the state's deficit and attract businesses, thus creating

jobs.

"There are lots of ways to cut spending, and most of them are the little things that people don't see," he said, referencing two state-owned golf courses currently operating at a loss.

Mills also said the state should outsource services such as landscaping.

"Something like hiring a company to cut grass along the roadside would be more efficient and not as costly," he said. "We can make the budget process open to competition. Throughout history, it's proven that when you do that, it works."

To boost the economy and attract businesses, Mills said the state should cut its sales and corporate taxes, which are "among the highest around."

"We need to do whatever we can to bring businesses back to Maryland," he said.

Ultimately, Mills believes his fresh perspective will get him elected.

"After you've been in office for a while, you start to get a certain mindset, whether you want to or not," he said. "As an outsider, I can offer new ideas. Some may say my approaches are 'out side the box,' but I think in the long run, people will think they're good ideas."

From the perspective of a longtime resident and local business owner, Cane said it will be difficult for a newcomer to win the seat.

"I think I've earned the privilege of gaining the respect from the citizens (in the district)," he said.

In a district whose minority population has historically outweighed the majority, Rudy Cane, as a civil rights advocate, could have a leg up on Mills.

However, Mills said he's not concerned, as he will approach the minority population just as he would the majority.

Cane said it could be difficult for a newcomer to sway this population.

"I think I have proven not only to the minority (population) but to the majority also that I've been able to bring businesses into the district and assist them financially," he said. "And I personally believe they are interested in a candidate that has a proven record of helping them, both minority and majority."

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At a glance

NAME. Rudy Cane

AGE. 76

EXPERIENCE. Member of House of Delegates since Jan. 13, 1999; Wicomico County councilman 1990-94

CAREER. Worked as an evaluation engineer for the state of Maryland for 31 years; part-owner of Cane's Rentals; former owner of Rudy Cane's Bonding Co.

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NAME. Dustin Mills

AGE. 25

EXPERIENCE. Former president of the College Republicans at Salisbury University; campaign manager for Michael James in the 2006 District 37B Delegate race; co-founder of the Lower Shore Young Republicans

CAREER. Special education teacher at Bennett Middle and James M. Bennett High schools; football, basketball and softball coach at JMB

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