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Bob Duff faces leadership challenge from Gary Winfield

By **Emilie Munson** Published 6:08 pm EDT, Thursday, September 6, 2018



IMAGE 1 OF 5

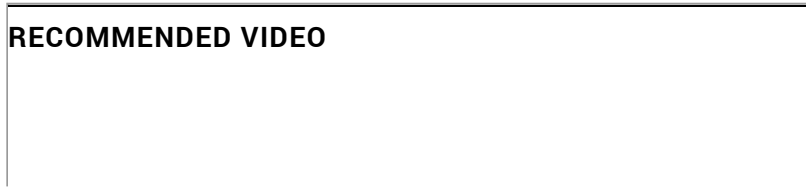
Democratic Sen. Gary Winfield of New Haven plans to challenge Senate Majority Leader Bob Duff for his leadership position.

NORWALK — Senate Majority Leader Bob Duff will face a rare challenge for his leadership position from a fellow Democrat hoping to push the party in a more progressive direction.

Sen. Gary Winfield of New Haven has been gathering support for his bid to take the Senate majority leader position, which Duff has held for three

years. Winfield, who is black, would be the first person of color ever elected to state Senate leadership if he is successful.

RECOMMENDED VIDEO



"There's a feeling that we don't always know where we are going, what is at the core of what we are doing," said Winfield in an interview

Thursday. "We need to be more clear about how progressive we are."



of other candidates, and raising

Winfield's challenge and ve.

ounced a "joint Democratic included support for "earned community college and protecting

health benefits.

Winfield said he agreed with this year's agenda but that in the past a clear Democratic platform was missing.

"The party as a whole, not just here but nationally, has not been talking about the issues that affect working people," he said. "You look at the elections this year and the surprises we've had across the country and what is evident to me is these people are back to talking about our core issues for our party. And that's something that people who consider themselves progressives should be pushing."

The Senate Democrats will vote on their caucus leadership immediately following the November election. If Republicans seize a majority in the Senate – now tied 18-18 – Winfield said he's not sure what would happen to his leadership bid.

The Senate majority leader runs the Senate floor, directing which bills should be called for debate and negotiating with the minority party on the agenda, Duff said. Only the majority leader and the Senate president pro tempore can coordinate with the

campaigns of Senate Democrats and spend party money to benefit them. The combination allows the majority leader to influence both law and politics.

Duff, Norwalk's five-term state senator, said he expects to keep his leadership position.

"I'm going to continue to work hard for the caucus and build our majority," he said. "I feel very confident in the support I have within the caucus and also within the candidates and challengers that are running on the Democratic line."

Winfield has been a key voice calling for the Democratic party to become more diverse this year. Winfield at the state Democratic Convention backed newcomer Eva Bermudez Zimmerman, a Latina union organizer, for lieutenant governor after dropping his own bid for the post. With tears in his eyes, he urged the party to elect candidates of color so his young children can see "the rhetoric matches the reality."

Winfield, also a union organizer, chairs the legislature's Banking and Energy and Technology Committees; Duff chaired those committees before Winfield. Both legislators were a state representative prior to his election to the state Senate.

Duff, who grew up in Norwalk, works as a realtor when not at the Capitol.

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