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Annapolis Advocate

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Two New Dates for Maryland Primary Elections

In 2012, Maryland will have a new date for its Presidential primary.

State legislators have voted to shift the primary balloting from the first Tuesday in February to the first Tuesday in April.

Additionally, a new federal law has forced Maryland to change its gubernatorial primary from the first Tuesday in September to the last Tuesday in June, starting in 2014.

Dear Neighbor: Looking Washington Way

Not feeling particularly optimistic lately? That's understandable. Our area economy hasn't improved all that much, and our county's reputation has taken a big hit with all those headlines on the Jack Johnson guilty plea.

So why am I — someone not normally considered a “rah-rah” kind of guy — feeling that our Prince George's County is actually moving on the upswing? I'll tell you why.

For starters, we have a new county executive, Rushern Baker, who's making the right moves and returning respectability to our county, after eight years of abysmal behavior by our former chief executive.

We also have new laws from the state legislature that curb the ability of developers to buy

political influence on zoning matters — and, conversely, make it much harder for crooked elected officials to shake down developers.

And we have exciting new attractions coming into the county, including the National Children's Museum and Tanger Shopping Outlets, both planned for National Harbor, as well as new projects in our own district. Our “makeover” remains far from complete, but it's beginning.

We still face, to be sure, two colossally challenging issues: schools and public safety.

We need better evaluation

systems in our schools and strong leadership in every school building, not just a few. At the same time, we need to

better celebrate our successes. Our own Hyattsville Middle School, for instance, has a

terrific performing arts component, and Greenbelt Middle School has a new principal and construction underway for a new building.

We have a choice. We can build on our successes or join the naysayers. I, for one, choose the former. That doesn't mean uncritical support — or cheer-leading. It does mean joining in, together, to help improve our county.

Paul

Amid hard times, we have real reason to feel good about our county's future.

Dynamic Development: From Poets to Classrooms

Local District Bond Bill Improvements

The District 22 legislative team in Annapolis was able, in this year's legislative session, to secure bond bills for two excellent projects in our district.

One will expand the **Riverdale Park** town hall to create a new youth and community wing. An additional 7,000 square feet will accommodate town council needs and be used for youth and community access.

The second project will see the renovation of the **Greenbelt Arts Center**. This work

will bring the Center into compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The Greenbelt Arts Center, one of only two community theaters in Prince George's County, provides low-cost, accessible, live entertainment to residents of Greenbelt and surrounding areas.

New Stores, Restaurants Open End of June

The retail component of the EYA project on Rte. 1 in Hyattsville has opened a Chipotle restaurant and will unveil a Busboys

and Poets, Tara Thai, and Big Bad Wolf in June.

Let's welcome these additions to our rejuvenated Hyattsville downtown. They'll join long-term anchor Franklin's Restaurant and General Store. Let's support them all.

Local School Construction and Renovation

Our local schools have new state funding on the way: \$3.3 million for constructing a new Hyattsville Elementary and \$1.9 million to renovate 16 classrooms at University Park Elem.

Scholarship Panel Tabs 80 Students

A big thanks to the members of Senator Pinsky's senatorial scholarship committee. The panel selected 80 district students for state senatorial scholarships.

Among the committee members: Nipah Shah and David Williams from Berwyn Heights; Darlene Pinnock and Felix Yeoman, Glenn Dale; Rae Brooks and Eulalie Gower-Lucas, Greenbelt; Katrina Dodro, Tamba Mayah, Jane Michalek, and Sarah Potter-Robbins, New Carrollton.

Also: Michael Abitong, Theresa Creel, Mark Matulef, Molly McKee, Tommy Paolucci, Kathleen Steuder, Maritza Velasquez, Hyattsville.

And finally: Nora Facchiano and Laverne Williams, Lewisdale; Jill Greenberg and Lisa Jackson, University Park; Lulu Alexander, Dorothy Brown, Dorothy Shackelford, and Dwayne Stanton, Lanham; Alice Bishop, Nicole Cox-Wade, Marita Novicky, and Amity Pope, Riverdale Park.

For the complete list of Senator Pinsky's scholarship recipients, check www.senatorpinsky.org.

Higher Education: Reining In the For-Profits . . .

Should colleges and universities focus on providing education or making a profit?

In Maryland, almost all colleges have historically either been public or private non-profit institutions.

But the higher ed landscape has been changing. Private, for-profit companies now enroll 10 percent of the nation's postsecondary students.

Federal investigations have shown that the nation's increasing number of for-profit colleges has brought increasing numbers of problems, everything from low graduation rates and huge student loan debt burdens to phony job placement guarantees.

To help protect Maryland students from these abuses, Senator Paul Pinsky introduced a bill earlier this year to much

more strictly regulate how for-profit colleges in Maryland do business.

The legislation aimed to restrict shady for-profit college recruitment practices, create a reimbursement fund for helping students when for-profit colleges default, and deny for-profit colleges future state taxpayer dollars.

Senator Pinsky's bill, a national pace-setter, went on to

gain legislative approval and pass into law. It's now getting replicated in other states, including California.

Maryland is leading the national drive to clamp down on postsecondary scam artists.

This past May, a *Sacramento Bee* editorial urged California lawmakers to take "a

page from the state of Maryland, where the Legislature has approved legislation to phase out all state aid to the for-profit schools and increase regulation."

Senator Pinsky's next higher ed challenge? That will be protecting students from the many unregulated online universities now flooding cyberspace with slick ads and big promises.

. . . And Truly Opening Up Opportunity for All

The U.S. Supreme Court declared over 20 years ago that all immigrant children, documented or undocumented, must be guaranteed an education straight through the 12th grade.

Do we, as a society, want these students to work hard and do their best to achieve when they reach high school or simply quit studying or, even worse, drop out?

Obviously, our entire society benefits when *all* students do their best to succeed.

That's one of the big reasons why Senator Pinsky and a clear majority of state lawmakers voted earlier this year to pass the Maryland DREAM Act, legislation that enables undocumented students raised in Maryland to pay tuition at Maryland's public colleges at in-state rates.

These new rates give all our

students, immigrants kids included, an incentive to work hard in school. Without in-state tuition rates, a college future simply becomes unaffordable for immigrant families.

Any new comprehensive national immigration policy that emerges in the years ahead will most likely have provisions that give young people from undocumented families the opportunity

to become citizens.

If this opportunity becomes law, wouldn't

it be to the country's advantage to have better educated new citizens? Senator Pinsky believes it would.

The newly enacted Maryland in-state tuition law includes a number of important stipulations.

An applicant, to qualify for in-state rates, must have attended a Maryland high school for at least three years, and the applicant's parents must have paid

taxes, as verified through tax identification numbers.

Applicants who meet these standards can attend, at in-state rates, a Maryland community college for two years. Then, after graduation from community college, they can complete their undergraduate education, if accepted, at a Maryland four-year college. But no Maryland student who's already a citizen and guaranteed admission, under current law, will be displaced.

These stipulations haven't received much public attention, and, in the absence of this information, the in-state tuition legislation has become somewhat of a political football. Some groups are pushing to have it repealed.

"Almost all of us in Maryland come from what once were immigrant families," notes Senator Pinsky. "This new in-state tuition legislation speaks to our basic values — and promotes a better future for all our kids. Let's let it work."

Environment: Bivalves, Benzene, and Our Future

Bringing Back the Bay

The best filter for cleaning pollutants from the Chesapeake Bay? We used to have a really terrific one. The oyster.

Over two hundred years ago this natural filter could clean the entire

bay — and did. Sure, we certainly do have more pollutants enter-

ing the bay these days. But our bigger problem has become the loss of our oysters.

We've lost close to 99 percent of the native oysters once found in the Chesapeake, mostly from disease. Now we face a new problem: poaching. Some rogue watermen are grabbing healthy oysters from protected reserves.

This poaching is taking place on a fairly widespread scale — and has now expanded to include the illegal harvesting of striped bass and crabs as well.

The state, unfortunately, has had limited tools to fight these criminal activities. That's why Senator Pinsky introduced legislation to extend fines and jail time for the poachers who are jeopardizing the Chesapeake's future.

"Sure, the bay's fishing industry is in decline," says the senator, "but fishing away the bay's future is unacceptable."

Senator Pinsky's bill passed in the 2011 legislative session.



Fear the Fracking

Energy companies are always looking for new cheap sources of energy. And natural gas fits that bill. But the exploration and drilling for natural gas can create some dire unintended consequences —

for our health.

New technologies can extract gas from shale fields, and we

have a large such field in the Appalachian Basin, the Marcellus shale field.

The problem: The process of getting at this natural gas, called "fracking," involves benzene and other chemicals and can contaminate our water table.

Pennsylvania, despite the danger, has given out fracking permits right and left. New York, on the other hand, has declared a moratorium on fracking.

The big energy companies, more concerned with capturing as much gas — and profit — as possible, want to move ahead with fracking in western Maryland, and they don't want to wait for government studies.

This year's legislative session saw a major battle over the issue. Senator Pinsky joined with environmental advocates to thwart the energy company push to frack away. But we can expect the issue to return.



Curtailing Sprawl

Containing suburban sprawl has never been easy, not in Prince George's or Montgomery County. And not elsewhere in the state as well.

Our state has lost considerable green space, and we've allowed more sediment erosion to flow into the Chesapeake Bay, further despoiling what's clearly our state's most important natural resource.

The problem is spreading. Housing developments without water and sewer systems are now getting planned for many Maryland rural areas.

These developments, if constructed, are going to have to use septic systems that generate large quantities of nitrogen, another dangerous pollutant that endangers the bay.

This past legislative session, Governor

O'Malley joined with our Senator Pinsky to testify on behalf of legislation the senator introduced to restrict new developments that rely on septic systems.

The bill had broad legislative support, but fell short of passage. The legislation will be reintroduced next year.

Something To Sing About

The **Hyattsville Middle School** band, orchestra and chorus recently did more than just compete in an international competition in Atlanta, Georgia. Our young musicians all earned superior ratings!

In addition, band director **Anthony Boyd** and the orchestra director **Deborah Simmons** received awards of distinction for their notable contribution to musical excellence.

Hyattsville Middle School has created a great performing arts program. Congratulations to all these talented students and directors.

Uncontrolled development endangers our state's resources.

New Carrollton Metro to Host Smart Growth Bid

The Washington area Metro Board of Directors has selected two groups, Forest City Enterprises and the Bethesda-based Urban Atlantic, to develop 39 acres near the New Carrollton Metro station.

The companies will lead a development team that will also include the Lanham-based Michael Cos. and Scientia Enterprises.

This public-private partnership will be Prince George's County's first transit-oriented

development project.

The project, when complete, will eventually bring millions of square feet in retail and office space and thousands of residences to the site.

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Now for E-News**

This *Annapolis Advocate* makes up just part of Senator Paul Pinsky's ongoing effort to keep 22nd district residents informed. Paul also writes a monthly email newsletter. To subscribe, e-mail "update-on@list.senatorpinsky.org" or sign up at senatorpinsky.org

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An Annapolis Scorecard: The 2011 Session

Bill	Description	Sen. Pinsky Position	Legislative Action
Electric Reliability	Requires PEPCO and other power companies to meet reliability standards and increases fines for not meeting them.	Co-sponsored by Sen. Pinsky	Amended and signed into law.
Victim's Rights	Prohibits property insurance companies from raising rates on victims of violent crime.	Sponsored by Sen. Pinsky	Passed into law.
Off-Shore Wind Farms	Requires long-term power purchase agreements that will enable the building of wind farms 11 miles off the coast of Ocean City.	Sponsored by Sen. Pinsky and Governor O'Malley	Failed in House and Senate Committees.
Ignition Interlock System	Expands use of safety ignition systems (car won't start if high alcohol blood level).	Supported by Sen. Pinsky	Passed into law.
Marriage Equality	Allows gays and lesbians to marry.	Co-sponsored by Sen. Pinsky	Passed Senate, failed in House.
Alcohol Tax	Increases tax on alcohol, with money to go for disabled citizens, education aid.	Supported by Sen. Pinsky	Passed into law.
Disposable Bag Bill	Authorizes county to impose a fee on disposable bags at grocery stores; encourages use of reusable bags.	Sponsored by Sen. Pinsky	Passed Senate, failed in House.
Incinerators and Clean Energy	Defines incinerators as clean, renewable energy; allows subsidies.	Opposed by Sen. Pinsky	Passed and signed into law.
Direct Wine Shipment	Allows wineries to ship wine direct to consumers.	Co-sponsored by Sen. Pinsky	Passed into law.
Combined Reporting	Shuts down tax dodge used by big corporations to avoid paying taxes.	Sponsored by Sen. Pinsky.	Not voted on in committee.
HOA Priority Liens	Gives homeowners/condo association liens priority in foreclosure sales.	Supported by Sen. Pinsky	Passed into law.