

TO CONTACT
SENATOR PINSKY:
301-858-3155

Scholarships Now Available

Interested in help paying for tuition at a Maryland college? If you live in the 22nd district, apply now to Senator Paul Pinsky's scholarship committee for a state senatorial scholarship.

The scholarships range up to \$2,000 annually, for as many as four years, and go to residents who've graduated high school or will be graduating high school or receiving a GED this spring.

To apply, click to www.senatorpinsky.org or call the senator's office at 301-858-3155. Or check with your local high school's guidance office. The application deadline: April 8.

Senator Pinsky's scholarship committee, made up entirely of citizen volunteers from the 22nd district, will be selecting the scholarship winners later this year.

Annapolis Advocate

Paul Pinsky, your senator in the 22nd district

Winter 2011

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Dear Neighbor: Toward a Better Year in 2011

Let me first wish you a happy and healthy new year. You've hopefully had some time to rest up and recharge with family and friends — and maybe even build up a little optimism for the year ahead.

It's not easy, I understand, to be optimistic these days at the national level, what with the ongoing economic slowdown and the new Republican control of the House.

But here in Prince George's County we do have reason for more than holiday cheer.

On the political front, our county has new leadership in County Executive Rushern Baker and the addition of some bright

new County Council members. Statewide, our governor, one of the nation's most progressive, enters his second term with double the margin of victory he had four years ago.

Economically, we're showing a few signs of recovery — everything from a decrease in foreclosures to somewhat lower unemployment — despite the feeble efforts in Congress to control Wall Street and the recent federal tax giveaway to millionaires.

We also need to recognize, of course, that even well-intended leaders can be blocked, diverted, or led astray — by opposition parties, lobbyists, and big money. Good intentions do not always carry the day.

That's why people at the grassroots must be vocal, mobilized, and committed to holding leaders accountable, whether their names be Obama, O'Malley, or Baker.

Getting good leaders elected, remember, only represents part of the challenge we face. Insuring that these leaders actually implement a progressive agenda ranks as the other.

Community, religious and labor activists, and other reformers need to constantly remain strong, loud, and vigilant. We need, after all, more than enlightened leaders. We need involved — and organized — communities.

Paul

A Guide to Getting Timely Help in Annapolis

Are you planning a family trip to the state capital anytime soon? Does your child's class have a trip to Annapolis in the works? Or your community group?

If you're headed to Annapolis — and need some help setting up a tour — why not give Senator Pinsky's reliable staff a call? Staffers are

ready and willing to help you get the most out of any visit to our state capital.

Senator Pinsky's office can also help out if you run into a problem with one of our state's many agencies or would like to know the status of a bill you've been tracking.

You can reach the sena-

tor's office, toll-free, at 301-858-3155 or, via email, at paul.pinsky@senate.state.md.us.

Staffing Senator Pinsky's office in 2011: administrative director Ian Ullman and community outreach director Lisa Lincoln. Janine Gonzalez and Sohayl Vafai will be on hand as interns.

Our Local Ethics

The Washington Post recently asked a variety of local leaders what Prince George's County can do to clean up county government. Here's how Senator Paul Pinsky responded.

New laws may be warranted, but unfortunately, as we've witnessed, having laws in place is no guarantee of legal or ethical practices.

Elected officials and others entrusted with the public welfare must be held to a high bar of ethics. That means greater accountability to the citizens and more thorough governmental oversight.

All county contracts must be vetted using rigorous standards; a strong firewall should be constructed prohibiting favoritism and "pay-to-play" arrangements.

Additionally, the loophole allowing County Council members to receive developer contributions through accounts for slates of candidates — while the council members are deciding zoning cases — should be changed.

County growth should be smart, environmentally friendly, and free of taint, perceived or real.

The best way to ensure long-term change is to empower county citizens and encourage them to demand a more honest government. If the people of Prince George's demand more and don't settle for less, we'll see changes.

Energy, Offshore Wind, and Electric Bills

Our weather strike you as a bit odd?

On the one hand, things seem to be getting colder. We all remember last year's big snowstorms.

Yet, on the other hand, the headlines shout global warming. For good reason: The latest stats confirm that 2010 will stand among the three warmest years on record. Our just-ended decade rates as the warmest ever.

In other words, we're living climate change. And our country continues to emit large quantities of greenhouse gases, the single biggest contributor to climate change, primarily by producing electricity.

We surely do, of course, need electricity, but we don't have to create this electricity by burning coal. Countries in Europe and Asia understand this. So why can't we switch to clean energy sources — like the wind, the sun, and "geothermal," the ground.



One reason: Current laws are stacked against clean energy sources. And the corporations currently producing energy the old way are in no hurry to change the rules.

Right now, the biggest clean-energy battle in our region revolves around plans to construct a wind farm ten miles off the coast of Maryland.

Such a wind farm will be expensive to build and start up. But a completed ocean-based wind farm will offer enough clean energy to power hundreds of thousands of homes.

The main obstacle: No wind company is going to make the necessary upfront investment without assurances that an electric utility will purchase its power over many years.

Our state currently doesn't have any long-term power-purchase agreements, or PPAs, in place. So our potential for clean energy remains untapped.

Into this mix comes the state of Delaware. Officials there have instituted PPAs and have already contracted to build a wind farm off their state's coast.

Senator Paul Pinsky will be introducing legislation this winter to move Maryland in the same direction. He'll be working with environmental and health advocates, as well as the alternative energy industry.

"There's no reason," says Senator Pinsky, "why Maryland shouldn't be a leader in both clean energy and lower bills for our consumers."

Time for a Maryland Plastic Bag Bill?

Plastic bags seem to be always blowing in the wind, fouling our streets and streams. So why can't we have a "bag bill" blow through the halls of our state capitol — and start discouraging the plastic excess around us?

Washington, D.C. has already adopted a tax on these bags, and the world didn't end. Why can't we?

Look around. More and more people are bringing their own bags into the supermarket, a common practice in Europe.

Why not move now to cut down on the production of unnecessary plastic and paper? Taking that step would save on the oil and electrical energy needed to manufacture the throwaway bags and re-

duce litter to boot.

Bills to discourage plastic bags have always met stiff opposition from the supermarket chains. "Too complicated," they proclaim, "an inconvenience."

"It's high time," says Senator Pinsky, "that we place the health of our planet and independence from big oil above convenience for supermarkets."

High Stakes: Budgets, Money, and Wealth

The state's budget shortfall — no surprise — will dominate the upcoming session in Annapolis. The well-documented shortfall may hit \$1.8 billion.

The problem: Our state is experiencing the same sort of woes that plague Maryland households, only magnified many times over.

With individual Maryland incomes down, state income tax collections are falling, too. And with people spending less, sales tax revenues are also sinking.

At the same time, costs for Medicaid and other mandated state services are rising.

Expenses up, income down: a sure prescription for budget trouble. What's the answer?

One camp says, "Slash and burn." Cut state agencies and employees. Reduce state enforcement and regulation. Slice public employee pensions. Remove people from Medicaid coverage.

"Let it hurt," these austerity advocates proclaim.

But cutting back on state services hurts us in our communities. Cutbacks mean fewer protections for our public health and the environment.

If we wink at greater illegal pollution, for instance, we're going to have more people getting sick.

And cutting pensions for state employees means penalizing people who

have loyally given thirty years and more of their lives to work for us.

Another camp — that includes Senator Pinsky — takes a different approach. This camp points out that if we can raise revenue, without hurting working families, we should go down that road before making any draconian cuts.

"Why should hard-working people pay for

the richest will face a 3.5 percent tax on income over \$500,000. Restoring the millionaire tax would subject income over \$1 million to a 6.5 percent levy.

Second, establish "combined reporting."

Many major corporations that do business in Maryland currently avoid paying corporate income tax in our state by setting up bogus subsidiaries in other

Maryland's wealthy will see a tax windfall from the federal level this year. They can afford to do much more to help our state.

Wall Street's mistakes?" the senator asks.

"Millionaires and billionaires just received a huge tax cut from the federal government," Senator Pinsky adds. "They're in a much better position to help during this downturn than average Marylanders."

How could that budget help best come?

Lawmakers, says Senator Pinsky, need to be looking at two particular proposals that could help end the relative free ride that America's — and Maryland's — wealthiest have enjoyed over recent years.

First, retain the millionaire tax. For the past three years, Maryland has had a special tax rate on income over a million dollars. This tax levy on millionaires expired January 1.

Without this millionaire's tax in effect, Maryland's

states to shield their Maryland business profits.

These accounting maneuvers have, over recent years, cost Maryland over \$100 million annually. Enacting a corporate tax reform known as "combined reporting" would eliminate this tax dodge.

Other revenue-generating steps also deserve lawmaker consideration in 2011. Among them:

Raise the tax on alcohol. Maryland's alcohol taxes sit among the lowest in the nation. Our spirits tax, the levy on hard liquor, ranks 47th in the nation and hasn't increased since 1955.

Increase the gas tax. An increase in the gas tax would hit pocketbooks. But a gas tax hike would also reduce auto pollution clean-up costs and could help in future years to fund expanded mass transit.

Did You Know?

Congress last month extended the tax cuts for America's most affluent originally enacted in 2001 and 2003. The extension will mean a mammoth savings for America's wealthy.

Average federal tax cut in 2011, by income group, from December 2010 federal tax deal



Source: Brookings-Urban Institute Tax Policy Center

Why Wait? Sign Up

Now for E-News

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

This newsletter, totally paid for by citizen donations, uses no state funds.

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An Education Commentary

Accentuating the Positive in Our Schools



By Senator Paul Pinsky

Newspapers across our region, in their education coverage, tend to focus on "failing" teachers. They typically pay little attention to our outstanding faculty members.

How do we know when our children have an outstanding teacher? Well, we do have some informal signs. A child who comes home inspired usually signals an outstanding teacher at work.

These days we also have a more objective way to identify great teachers: National Board for Professional Teacher Standards certification.

Since 1987, this independent National Board has certified for excellence over 91,000 teachers across the United States. To gain this certification — a status comparable to medical board certification — teachers must success-

fully complete an incredibly rigorous year-long process that involves multiple measures and indicators, including videotaped teaching and class logs.

Fewer than 50 percent of applicants who apply for National Board certification make their way successfully through this demanding process the first time around.

Last month, the National Board announced that 76 Prince George's teachers have just earned National Board certification status, the fifth largest number for a school system in the entire United States.

This announcement marked the first time that Prince George's County has ever surpassed neighboring Montgomery County in the number of new National Board-certified teachers.

Overall, Prince George's now has 257 National Board teachers, the third-highest county total in Maryland.

National studies report that students of National Board-certified teachers show marked learning

On one new measure of school excellence, Prince George's now tops Montgomery.

gains over students in other classrooms.

And even those teachers who don't initially win National Board status say they find the rigorous application process an important step toward helping them become better teachers.

Over the years, I've worked in Annapolis to make sure Maryland teachers have the financial help they need to successfully complete the National Board certification process. And that support, the new data show, is clearly paying off!