

Annapolis Advocate

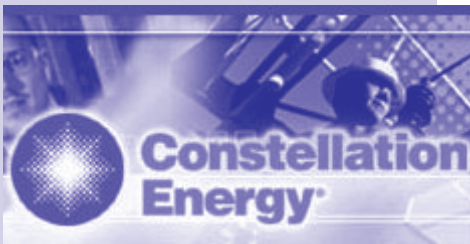
Paul Pinsky, your senator in the 22nd District

January 2006 Phone: 301-858-3155 E-mail: Paul_Pinsky@senate.state.md.us



Question:

Who should set energy and environmental policy in Maryland, our state's people or the power companies?



Answer:

Governor Bob Ehrlich would rather you not ask. More inside.

A Look Behind Our Political Scenes

Interested in more frequent updates on Maryland politics from Senator Paul Pinsky? Just check out the senator's free monthly e-newsletter. Each issue offers inside information on our state's body politic and Senator Pinsky's "take" on political happenings across the county, state, and nation.

Sign up today by emailing update-request@senatorpinsky.org. Be sure to type the word "subscribe" in the "subject" line.

Dear Neighbor,

Maybe we *are* getting a few things right here in Maryland. States across the country are now looking carefully — and admiringly — at some of the innovative legislative initiatives that went through our State House in Annapolis last year.

I feel really good about that, particularly since I was able to play a significant role in these exciting initiatives that have been attracting so much national attention.

On the top of the innovation list: the health care "Fair Share" legislation Maryland lawmakers passed last winter. This legislation requires big employers to spend an amount equal to at least 8 percent of their employee salaries on employee health care — or else contribute to Maryland's Medicaid fund.

Why do we need a mandate like this? Giant companies like Wal-Mart are currently setting aside only crumbs for their workers' health care, knowing full well that their employees will have to turn to Medicaid for help.

Our tax dollars pay for Medicaid. In other words, Wal-Mart is pumping up its bottom-line profits by shunting its health care costs into taxpayers. Wal-Mart today is still pumping up its profits with this health care dodge, since our governor, ever so considerate to corporate sensibilities, vetoed the "Fair Share" legislation.

I'll be joining a number of my lawmaker colleagues, early in the 2006 session, to press for an override of the governor's veto. Other states are watching closely to see if we can pull this override off. The vote really matters — to our health care future.

Other states are also watching what Maryland is doing on the international trade agreement front. Last session, I was the lead sponsor of legislation to require prior approval by Maryland lawmakers before our governor can sign his name to any international trade agreement that the White House might be pushing. The bill also required Maryland's removal as an endorser of last year's Central America Free Trade Agreement, or CAFTA.

Before last year's session, Gov. Ehrlich had unilaterally signed on to CAFTA, an ill-advised agreement that privileges corporate interests and undermines the job and financial security of average families. But Maryland's lawmakers passed the prior approval bill I introduced, then went ahead and overrode the governor's veto.

Maryland thus became the first state whose legislature requested its name be pulled off the Bush administration's CAFTA. This past fall, I explained how we did that to a national conference of state legislators.

Will there be other innovative initiatives in this year's session? We can only hope. The Healthy Air Act I'm sponsoring (see inside this newsletter) may well fit this nationally significant category. But with elections just around the corner, this upcoming legislative session will likely be fraught with a great deal of posturing.

However the session evolves, I'll be "pushing the legislative envelope" to make our state the kind of place of which we can all be proud.

A fair economy, real democracy, and livable communities

Education

Attracting, and Keeping, Good Teachers

In 2006, lawmakers will see new proposals to help hard-to-staff schools

An experienced educator with 30 years in the field heads up the state legislature's Education Subcommittee in Annapolis. And that educator is none other than our own state Senator Paul Pinsky.

In the upcoming session, Senator Pinsky will be introducing legislation to help our local public schools — particularly schools considered “difficult to staff” — attract and retain more highly effective teachers.

The legislation will center on helping fill Maryland's classrooms with more nationally board-certified teachers. These are teachers who have passed a year-long, rigorous national assessment that demonstrates their teaching expertise.

Teachers who earn this national board certification really know both the subject they teach and how to teach it, to all sorts of different youngsters.

Senator Pinsky introduced the original

Maryland legislation that encourages teachers to go through the national certification process. Statewide, Maryland now has 660 nationally certified teachers.

On other education fronts, Senator Pinsky will be working to clear up the “charter school” mess in the state.

Two years ago, lawmakers enacted a bill that would allow the creation of charter schools — schools that don't operate under normal local school board control — in Maryland.

The new law carried provisions designed to make sure that all charter

schools in the state would be held to strict financial and instructional accountability standards. Some observers felt this new law didn't give charters enough flexibility, others too much.

In any case, over the last two years, the state Board of Ed and local school boards, as well as state courts, have tried to reinterpret the bill's meaning, throwing the law into almost total confusion.

Senator Pinsky will be introducing legislation to clarify the bill's intent and restrict charter schools that place unqualified teachers in front of students.

Appointed County Board of Ed Won't Last Past This Year

A little over three years ago, state lawmakers replaced Prince George's elected school board with an appointed one. The appointed board's tenure will end next fall. The next school board will be elected. Senator Paul Pinsky helped make sure of that when he joined with fellow legislators to write into law language that automatically sets in place a return to an elected board.

One of the last actions of the current appointed board may be the selection of a new superintendent. A search firm is expected to bring a name forward later this winter.

The Local Scene

Schools, Boundaries, and Helping Kids Succeed

Back in 2004, a task force on student capacity in Prince George's County recommended two new high schools: one serving the Upper Marlboro area and another in the northwest corridor for Hyattsville, Adelphi, and part of Beltsville.

The school board then went ahead and held hearings to consider specific school sites. But before a final site could be approved for the northwest area, and almost overnight, the County Council adopted an alternative plan that removed the northwest high school and replaced it with a school in south Bowie.

This decision came despite the current severe overcrowding at Northwestern High School. That facility, next to Eleanor Roosevelt, is the county's most overcrowded high school.

Parents at Northwestern couldn't believe the County Council would

approve such a move. Even the Bowie PTA opposed the new Bowie school!

The rationale for this new facility? With expected growth, some said, Bowie is sure to need it. But the actual numbers make clear that, to reduce current overcrowding, any new school needs to be placed in the Hyattsville/Adelphi area.

By ignoring these numbers, Council members were essentially playing political games.

Meanwhile, a much-needed new elementary school is about to open in west Hyattsville to

relieve overcrowding in that area. This has necessitated some boundary changes.

Unfortunately, one of the eight changes proposed by the Board of Ed would have shifted a large number of students currently served by **University**

Park Elementary out of that school.

At the same time, this proposal would have brought in an even larger number of students, making the school even more overcrowded than it is currently.

The large, vocal response from the school and the affected neighborhoods (including parts of Hyattsville and College Park) revealed communities that

Parents throughout the 22nd district are demonstrating their commitment to learning environments that work.

are committed to their schools. Over 300 people came out twice to express their concerns to the school board and to offer alternative solutions.

The result? School board staff have just recommended a return to the status quo.



Who's Running This State Anyway?

Inside the Ehrlich inner circle, industry lobbyists are running wild

Last winter, in the 2005 state legislative session in Annapolis, a state senator asked the Department of the Environment for information about a bill to reduce utility company emissions that pollute our atmosphere.

Where do you think department officials turned for the information to answer that query? To its own independent environmental experts? To the federal Environmental Protection Agency? Nope on both accounts.

Department officials turned for answers to a utility company, one of the very companies — Constellation Energy — the bill in question aimed to regulate.

And then Maryland Environment Department officials actually cut and pasted that company's position on the bill onto state stationery, right under the state letterhead.

This all came to light last month in a

well-researched Baltimore Sun exposé. The Sun article also elaborated some fascinating additional information. Turns out that a number of key Environment Department staffers in the Ehrlich administration formerly worked for — you guessed it — Constellation Energy.

One of these staffers, who lobbied extensively *against* the bill to regulate Constellation's emissions, held stock worth \$50,000 in the company at the same time she was working for the state.

Should any of this come as a surprise? Senator Paul Pinsky, the lead sponsor of the bill to clamp down on power plant pollution, doesn't think so.

"When the Ehrlich administration pulled out all stops to defeat that

emission bill, he was simply fronting for the industry," Senator Pinsky points out. "The governor is putting power industry profits ahead of people's health."

Senator Pinsky's bill would have restricted emissions of four harmful pollutants, including the mercury that

'The governor is putting power industry profits before people's health.'

Senator Paul Pinsky

turns up in fish and has been proven to be harmful to pregnant women and their fetuses.

In the 2006 session, Senator Pinsky will be reintroducing a new version of his emissions bill. This legislation is expected to have the full support of environmental and consumer groups across the state.

Elections

A Gameplan for Getting Big Money Out of Politics

Four years ago, in the 2002 state elections, candidates in one state Senate race spent over a million dollars. The salary for that much-sought after Senate seat? About \$40,000.

In the upcoming 2006 gubernatorial race, Gov. Ehrlich is amassing a \$20 million campaign war chest.

Big money is clearly driving our politics in Maryland today, just as Big Money is calling the shots at the federal level and in other states as well.

But some states are pushing back.

This past fall, Connecticut joined Arizona and Maine and became the third state to enact a public financing system for state election contests.

Here's how the new "clean money" systems in these three states work: Any candidates who seeks public funding must first collect a significant number of

small (\$5 or more) contributions from voters in their districts, to prove they're legitimate candidates with a real base.

Candidates who meet this threshold become entitled to public funds for their

In 2004, the average cost of winning a seat in the United States Senate totaled \$8 million. In the Presidential race, the total campaign cost topped \$1 billion for the first time ever.

campaigns, so long as they agree to stay within a proscribed campaign spending limit and not to use additional private contributions in their campaigns.

The clean money systems now in place in Connecticut, Arizona, and Maine operate on purely voluntary basis. That is, candidates don't have to seek public

financing. They can stay private.

But if a publicly financed candidate runs against someone who uses private contributions to spend beyond the limit, additional public funds will go to the publicly financed candidate.

So what's so good about "clean money" campaign reform?

Clean money reforms help level the playing field for candidates who can demonstrate broad support among average people. With public dollars, these candidates can compete effectively against well-connected candidates who rely on wealthy contributors and special interests.

In Maine and Arizona, a majority of candidates are now running "clean" campaigns. Here in Maryland, Paul Pinsky is the prime Senate sponsor for this much needed, democracy-building reform.

A Legislative Survey for 22nd District Residents

Where Do You Stand on the Issues?

Want to share your priorities with Senator Pinsky? Just fill out the survey below – by circling your choices – and mail your answers to Sen. Pinsky, 220 James Senate Office building, Annapolis, MD 21401. Thank you!

1. I feel that the issue of crime is being adequately addressed in Prince George's County.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

2. I support the re-importation of prescription drugs from Canada to reduce drug prices.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

3. Maryland should tax families with incomes over \$400,000 at higher rates than families below that level.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

4. I would consider voting for an independent candidate over a Democrat in a local or statewide race if the independent candidate was more progressive.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

5. Maryland should move to a system of publicly financed political campaigns and replace the current system that's based on special-interest contributions.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

6. Maryland should do away with the death penalty.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

7. My major local or state concern is _____

Name _____ E-Mail _____

Phone _____ Address _____ City _____

Scholarship Applications Available

Are you or one of your children attending college next year? Applications for State Senatorial Scholarships are now available by either calling 301-858-3155 or e-mailing Paul_Pinsky@senate.state.md.us. Applications are due April 7. These scholarships from \$200 to \$2,000 can be used at any Maryland institution of higher education or outside the state for a unique major.

Senator Paul Pinsky Will Seek Re-Election

Declaring that 'there's more to be done' and that the 22nd district 'deserves a strong and forceful voice,' Senator Paul Pinsky has announced his intent to run for re-election to the Maryland Senate later this year. The senator is completing his third term in the Senate, after serving two terms in the Maryland House of Delegates.

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