

428th Legislative Session Begins

The 428th Legislative Session of the Maryland General Assembly began on January 12, 2011 with the swearing-in of all of the Members. This is my second term serving the citizens of North and West Anne Arundel County as a Delegate representing District 32. I am honored and humbled to serve the constituents of District 32 and all Maryland Citizens.

I expect this Legislative Session will be the most difficult session in my short tenure. While the looming budget crisis will be the most complicated issue we face during these 90 days, it will not be the only important issue. This news letter will list a few of items that I expect to see this year; I welcome your thoughts and comments on these issues and any issue that concerns you. As the session develops and legislation is introduced and fine tuned, I will continue to update you regarding the bills and the discussions surrounding issues.

Slots - This issue will surely be revisited. Two locations, Rocky Gap and Baltimore City do not have valid bids. Mr. Peter Angelos is interested in purchasing Rosecroft for a VLT location, but this was not on the referendum as a possible location. Speaker Busch has indicated that: "People are going to want to push for full gaming." Considering that we are competing with a very successful Charlestown, I am sure the Speaker is correct.

Alcohol – There are two important issues concerning alcohol legislation. One is the "10 cents per drink" tax, which is truly 10 cents per ounce of wine and liquor and would also affect purchases of beer. This affects retail, bar and restaurant purchases of wine, alcohol and beer. The other alcohol issue is "direct shipment of wine." Under current law, our local Maryland wineries cannot direct ship out of Maryland and Maryland residents cannot receive direct shipment of wine.

Drunken and Distracted Driving – Look for Bills making cell phone use while driving a primary offense and also closing the loophole allowing you to READ a text while driving. Also a bill requiring the use ignition interlock devices for all persons convicted of drunken driving is expected.

Gas Tax - The 23.5 cent per gallon tax has not been increased for almost 20 years creating a great deal of discussion about increasing it. This is not without problems, currently the State can "borrow" money from the Transportation Fund for use in the General Fund, if the gas tax is

increased this loophole must be closed. Gas is already so expensive I do not expect an increase in gas tax to be well received.

Pensions - A pension sustainability commission has recommended several changes that will be considered for State Employee and teacher pensions. I expect this will be a major piece of the Budget discussions. The state budget cannot continue to absorb the ballooning pension costs without some revision.

Campaign Finance - Attorney General Doug Gansler is proposing 25 changes to current campaign finance laws, including several to close various loopholes including the "LLC Loophole" permitting certain businesses to avoid contribution limits.

Energy - Wind Energy and Marcellus shale gas drilling will dominate the energy legislation this session. There is concern that shale gas drilling will pollute our streams and contaminate residential wells. Expect legislation to encourage a greater supply of wind energy.

Charter Schools - Look for legislation to help charter schools, especially to assist the charter schools with building locations.

Chesapeake Bay - Storm-water run-off is a significant polluter of the Bay. Underperforming storm-water devices fill the Bay with silt. Expect to see legislation requiring local jurisdictions to improve and retrofit storm-water devices and storm drains.

Immigration – Both sides of the immigration issue will be discussed. One delegate has promised 16 bills that crack-down on illegal immigration; including one to require proof of legal presence for social services. On the other side, another bill will allow State Colleges and Universities to charge in-state tuition for immigrants.

Same Sex Marriage – Expect to see bills to appeal the prohibition of same sex marriage and bills that strengthen the prohibition of same sex marriage.

The General Assembly Website: www.mlis.state.md.us contains useful information on the bills considered by the General Assembly. You can check by sponsor, subject or bill number.

Please feel free to let me know how you feel about these and any other issues; your thoughts and ideas are always important to me. I can be reached at Pamela.beidle@house.state.md.us or at 410-841-3370 if I can be of any assistance. During the session, I get thousands of letters and emails, be sure to include your name and address when you write to me. My staff and I read each and every piece of correspondence and will get back to you as soon as possible.

Please welcome Vincent LaMartina to my staff, as my intern for this session. Also, Nancy Lipin Crawford is continuing as my Legislative Assistant for her fifth year.

For more frequent updates about my activities in Legislative Session 2011, please visit my Facebook page, *Delegate Pam Beidle*.

Best regards,

Pamela G. Beidle

State Delegate, District 32

Environmental Matters Committee