

February 26, 2009

General Assembly Update.

As I write this, we are about halfway through our 90 Day session, with six weeks left and a great deal of work to be done.

The Structural Deficit Continues to Loom

The Recovery Act (The Stimulus Package), passed by Congress, is not going to fix the structural deficit for Maryland. While we stand to receive \$3.75 Billion over a period of three fiscal years, much of this money does not flow through state budget and does not provide the flexibility to erase our operating budget shortfall. Much of the funding is based on current federal formulas or block grants that are not part of the state's general fund budget.

The Maryland State Transportation budget will benefit by some of the money from the stimulus funds, \$141.8 million will go to "Phase One" projects. That is projects that are shovel ready. Anne Arundel will benefit with a \$3 million restoration of the BWI Marc Station and nearby Laurel will see a \$2.9 million Laurel Station Rehab. Overall this stimulus money will represent 10,000 jobs. Considering that the State's transportation fund revenues are down nearly \$350 million a year, this stimulus money is important to our infrastructure and our economy. More information is on the MDOT website:

http://www.mdot.state.md.us/Planning/Economic_Recovery/Economic_Recovery_Powerpoint_02-18-09.pdf

The current FY 09 budget shortfall is approximately \$340 million and March revenues are sure to show additional declines. Our state revenues are income from income tax, sales tax, the transfer tax from home sales and capital gains from the sale of stocks or mutual funds that have experienced a gain. Needless to say, the entire country is in a downward spiral and our revenues are a reflection of what is happening around the country. We are actually in better fiscal conditions than most states. Kansas cannot afford to give State tax refunds and California is laying off 20,000 workers. Our five day furlough is minor compared to these layoffs.

However, Maryland will continue to experience a structural deficit unless we make changes in our mandates and formulas. The legislature thought we passed changes in the 2007 Special Session

that would erase the structural deficit, little did we know that the entire country would be in recession and our budget changes would not be as effective as planned. So we are again looking at a 1.9 billion dollar structural deficit. Our chairman of appropriations, Delegate Norman Conway, stated at a recent meeting, "WE must get a grip on our baseline budget and review mandates and formulas that are driving our increases in our budget." He gave us one example of a "Disparity Grant" that was initiated in 1998 for \$8 million and has now grown to \$121 million 2009 as the result of a formula.

So, while we all want great schools, community colleges, four year universities, libraries, well maintained roads, health care, as well as our own personal agendas, it is time to make tough decisions. Everyone, every organization, every agenda, will feel some pain as we trim this budget to address the structural deficit.

On a very positive note, Nancy Kopp, State Treasurer, just wrote: "the bond rating agencies have affirmed the State's strong Triple AAA bond rating in preparation for the upcoming sale of \$515 million of Maryland General Obligation bonds." Maryland residents will have first priority in a retail sale of bonds that begins Friday, February 27 and continues on March 2 and March 3. All three rating agencies, Standard & Poors, Fitch, and Moody's recognized the extent to which Maryland has addressed the severe budget problems and the economic downturn. They all noted the tough decisions made by the Legislature in the 2007 Special Session and commended our efforts and prudent oversight.

Update on my three bills.

House Bill 287 addresses issues with condominium law and the condominium Master policy deductible. It will be heard in the Environmental Matters Committee on Thursday, February 26. I continue to work with condo unit owners, the insurance industry and the consumer agencies for a bill that all can agree upon.

House Bill 1214 which proposes a change to the lyrics, but not the melody, of the State Song, *Maryland my Maryland*, will be heard on March 11. The students from Glen Burnie Park Elementary plan to join us that day for a press conference and testimony. The bill can be found at: <http://mlis.state.md.us/2009rs/bills/hb/hb1241f.pdf>. The Capital Newspaper on February 23rd published an editorial regarding HB 1214. It stated:

"WORDS AND MUSIC - We suppose Del. Pamela Beidle of Linthicum will take the usual shots from wiseacres for offering legislation to change the words of the state song, "Maryland, My Maryland." With all the important matters waiting to be settled, why should she be wasting her taxpayer-subsidized time on this trivia? And so forth and so on.

This issue is a perennial, and there are always lots of things that are more important. But what her bill proposes is so sensible that it ought to be approved by the General Assembly after about five minutes of thought. There is, indeed, no reason to waste a lot of time on it.

Most Marylanders can hum their state song, because it uses the same traditional melody used for "O Christmas Tree." Most state residents don't know the words - for good reason.

The words, written in 1861 by James Ryder Randall, are an overwrought nine-stanza hymn to the glory of taking up arms for the Confederacy. Randall starts with a reference to "the despot's heel" - the despot was Abraham Lincoln - and climaxes by urging Marylanders to proudly spurn "the Northern scum."

Isn't it a trifle odd to have a state anthem that virtually glows with out-and-out hatred - and not of foreign enemies, but of other Americans?

Beidle's legislation would replace Randall's words with a four-stanza poem of the same rhyme scheme written by Maryland educator John T. White in 1894. It's not great poetry either, but it's intelligible, expresses vast pride in the state - and is not an embarrassment. You could actually teach schoolchildren to sing it.

Couldn't we at least have a state song with words that don't make today's Marylanders cringe?"

House Bill 1386 will not allow piers to be built over State Wetlands. This means State designated Wetlands. This bill does not have a hearing scheduled at this time.

My Committee Work

The Environmental Matters Committee continues to hear about a dozen bills a day on environmental issues, land use local government issues, and motor vehicle issues. Bills like "Smart, Green and Growing," House Bills, 294 and 295 are all part of the administrations bills. Read more at: <http://www.green.maryland.gov>. We will also share the Global Warming bill with the Economic Matters Committee. House Bill 297 addresses the Terrapin Run law suit and requires Counties to be consistent with the General Development Plan that is approved by the citizens.

Improvements for BRAC on Route 175

Please watch for information about a public workshop concerning the upgrades to six intersections around Fort Meade. The workshop will be held at Meade Middle School on March 31. You can stop by anytime between 5:30 and 7:30. The six intersections are:

MD 175 and Blobs Park/Clark Road
MD 175 and MD 713
MD 175 and Disney Road
MD 175 and Mapes Road
MD 175 and MD 174 (Reece Road)
MD 174 and Severn Road

\$31.6 million in funds are available for these improvements, but it is not enough money to do all six intersections. Your comments are important to establish the priority of this road work to improve the intersections.

Delegate Scholarships

Delegate Scholarships are available subject to funds allocated in the State Budget. I have formed a Scholarship Committee to review and consider all applications. The applicant's scholastic performance and the family's financial situation are heavily weighted. The application is available at my website: www.pambeidle.com. The **House of Delegates Scholarship Application** must be completed in its entirety and returned along with **an original full transcript** from your current educational institution and the mandatory written essay. The **application, essay and transcript** must be received no later than **March 31, 2009**.

Please continue to stay in touch, email me, call me, and let me know your position on bills and issues. Thank you for allowing me to serve you in the House of Delegates.