

# Mike Miller resigns from Md. Senate after 45 years: ‘The cancer is in all my bones’

By **Paul Schwartzman**

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Thomas V. Mike Miller Jr., a towering political force in Maryland for five decades, resigned from the state Senate on Wednesday, saying his health was failing and he no longer had the strength to serve.

Miller (D-Calvert), 78, was elected to the Senate in 1974 and served as the chamber’s president for 33 years, longer than any state Senate leader in the country.

He relinquished the gavel in 2019 after being diagnosed with Stage 4 prostate cancer and was replaced as chamber leader by Sen. Bill Ferguson (D-Baltimore City). But Miller kept his seat representing parts of Prince George’s, Calvert and Charles counties.

Now, with his cancer spreading and the legislature set to reconvene in mid-January, Miller said that he could no longer meet the needs of his constituents and that it was time to retire.

“I thought I could continue on. My mind is fine, but the cancer is in all my bones,” Miller said during a news conference his staff arranged on Zoom from his home. “My body is racked with pain. I have no strength in my right side.”

His retirement, effective immediately, triggered an outpouring of praise from Maryland’s political establishment.

“He will go down in our state’s history as a lion of the Senate,” said Gov. Larry Hogan (R), for whom Miller babysat when he was a child.

The governor will choose a successor to fill out the remainder of Miller’s term from a list of nominees sent to him by the Democratic committees in each of the three counties in the district.

Despite his deteriorating health, Miller had hoped to be in his seat next month, telling Maryland Matters reporter Bruce DePuyt in early December that he was still serving his constituents “every day through email and through the virtual Internet.”

At his news conference, Miller appeared alert, though thin and pale in a red V-neck sweater in the library of his home in Southern Maryland. He said he hoped he would be remembered as a “hard worker” and an “ethical” leader who cared about public education, protecting the Chesapeake Bay and crafting legislation with both Republicans and Democrats.

“If my legacy means anything, we brought the Republicans to the table,” he said. “If their name was on a bill, it didn’t mean it would be dead.”

He praised Ferguson for having “reached out to the governor, a man of a different party.”

“That’s what it takes,” he said.

With his thick mane of white hair and hulking presence, Miller’s durability made him as much a part of Annapolis’s vista as the State House dome. A pragmatist, he was adept at reading the political winds as his state tilted leftward.

Despite his moderate views, he backed the repeal of the death penalty and enactment of same-sex marriage nearly a decade ago, and he led the campaign to legalize casino gambling in Maryland.

Reflecting on his tenure, Miller told reporters that it was his well-known interest in history that guided him as he navigated legislative battles.

“I grew up before television. My aunts and uncles, for Christmas and birthdays, they would give me books, and I would read and study,” he said. “And I know what other leaders have done in similar situations. I’m able to find alternatives and move forward.”

In his resignation letter to Ferguson, Miller bemoaned the rancor that has divided much of the country in recent years, writing that “true compromise has become the enemy of elected officials.”

“That lack of unity, inability to compromise, and belief that each political party can walk alone has a tremendous price,” he wrote. “It leaves our citizenry cynical and angry and shakes their confidence in government.”

The oldest of 10 children, Miller grew up in Clinton, Md., where his family founded B.K. Miller’s, a general store where he worked and says he learned lessons he took with him to politics.

“I learned that the customer was always on the right side,” he told reporters Wednesday. “You have to be available to help the public.”

“I brought those attributes to the Senate in Maryland,” he said.

Miller was once considered a gubernatorial contender, but his statewide prospects ended in 1989 when he was caught on television using a profanity to describe Baltimore. He held on to his Senate leadership post for the next 30 years.

“We’ve made great things happen,” he said. But he also said the moment had arrived to allow for a new generation of leaders.

“It’s a younger group with some very progressive ideas,” he said. “It’s a good time for me to step down, quite frankly.”

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