

POLITICS

Maryland Senate president Miller plans to fight prostate cancer, 'fully carry out' Senate responsibilities

By PAMELA WOOD and LUKE BROADWATER
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Maryland state Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller, Jr., announced a recent diagnosis in the Senate Chamber, referencing that he has been diagnosed with prostate cancer, Thursday January 10, 2019.



An emotional Maryland Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller, a powerful and long-tenured figure in state government, announced Thursday he is undergoing treatment for prostate cancer and vowed to continue working throughout the General Assembly session.

“I fully intend to fight this disease, as so many have, and to fully carry out my Senate responsibilities,” he said in a statement he distributed as he opened the chamber’s morning floor session.

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Miller, a Democrat who has served as Senate president since 1987, choked back tears as he spoke briefly about his condition.

“It’s a recent diagnosis,” Miller said. “I wanted to get it out as quickly as possible. ... You look in the morning and see if your hair is still there.”

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Miller did not discuss details of his diagnosis, but his chief of staff confirmed the cancer has metastasized, or spread beyond the prostate, and is in an “advanced” stage. Miller has started chemotherapy at Johns Hopkins in Baltimore and will receive treatment about every three weeks. The number of the chemotherapy sessions has not been determined.

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Miller said he didn’t want attention on him, but on the work of the Senate.

“It’s not about me,” he said. “We have business to take care of.”

Miller, 76, was elected in 1970 to the House of Delegates. He was elected to the Senate in 1974. His district includes parts of Calvert, Charles and Prince George’s counties. He is an attorney with a private practice.

In his statement, Miller said that he has been “struggling with pain management” for months following hip and knee replacement surgery that “never seemed to heal.”

“This past July, I was diagnosed with prostate cancer along with my osteopathic issues. I was prescribed medicines for the prostate cancer and continued physical therapy,” Miller said.



Miller cancer announcement

President of the Senate Thomas V. Mike Miller Jr. walks into the Senate Chamber before an announcement that he has been diagnosed with prostate cancer. (Joshua McKerrow / Capital Gazette)

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Miller said that the pain continued, and he awoke with sharp pain in his leg on Dec. 27. Further testing at Johns Hopkins Hospital led to the decision to undergo chemotherapy.

Senators re-elected Miller as president of the Senate on Wednesday, the **first day of the annual 90-day General Assembly session.**

Miller said he didn't plan to miss work during the session.

"I have been told that in spite of my treatments, I will be fully able to join my colleagues and preside this session. Despite my longevity as president, I have never sought to retain this position out of personal gratification, but out of a true belief I could lead the body to the tremendous achievements we have accomplished together over the years."

While not speaking about Miller's case specifically, Dr. Ryan Cleary, a urologic oncologist at MedStar Franklin Square Medical Center, said chemotherapy once was seen as a "last resort" for prostate cancer, but is now being introduced earlier as a course of treatment. Cleary said some recent studies have shown that adding chemotherapy to hormone medication improves survival rates for some men.

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When cancer is discovered that is localized in the prostate, the prognosis is often good — close to 90 percent.

"The majority of men, by far, if they are treated for prostate cancer, do not die from prostate cancer," Cleary said.

But metastatic cancer, meaning it has spread to other parts of the body, has a five-year survival rate of about 30 percent.

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Support from around the state quickly poured in for Miller. Melanie Miller, one of Miller's five adult children, said the family is buoyed by the outpouring of well wishes.

“The sickness of a parent is the great equalizer, as every family experiences it,” she said. “In Maryland, we are fortunate to have the best medical care in the nation and believe our father’s care is in great hands.”

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Gov. Larry Hogan, a Republican and cancer survivor, said he is praying for Miller.

“I know firsthand how hard it is to receive a diagnosis like this,” Hogan said in a statement. “But I also know firsthand that Mike Miller has earned his place in Maryland political history because he’s a fighter who always gives it everything he’s got, no matter how tough things get.”

Sen. Jim Rosapepe, a Prince George’s County lawmaker and chairman of Senate Democratic Caucus, said he believed Miller will fight cancer as Hogan did.

“Just like Governor Hogan faced his illness and kept on track leading the state, President Miller will power through leading the Senate,” Rosapepe said. “With God’s love — and health insurance — he’ll have the speedy recovery we all wish him.”

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Serving as president of the Senate can, at times, be physically and

mentally taxing, especially toward the end of the 90-day session when daily meetings of the Senate last for several hours. The president stands on a rostrum at the front of the chamber, conducting the Senate’s business. The president calls on senators to speak during debates and manages the flow of amendments and votes.

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Any time the president is not available, the Senate president pro tem fills in as presiding officer. Sen. Kathy Klausmeier of Baltimore County was elected Wednesday to the post and will preside Friday over the Senate for the first time, when Miller is scheduled to have chemotherapy.

“It’s not the way I ever envisioned what I was going to be doing,” Klausmeier said. “It’s just a sad day for everybody. As you could see, he was pretty sad, too.”

Sen. Stephen Hershey, an Eastern Shore Republican who serves as minority whip, said he’s confident Miller will make sure the Senate runs smoothly.

“I think Mike is going to do the best job that he can to see that the floor operates in the same manner ... I’m sure part of what he is concerned about is that we can operate the same way we always have,” Hershey said.

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In his long tenure as president, Miller has solidified his control of the chamber, adapting as the interests of members changed. He allowed bills he personally opposed — such as legalizing same-sex marriage — to move forward, recognizing that a majority of senators supported them. He’s earned respect from senators from both parties.

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Miller is currently the longest-serving state Senate leader in the nation, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Todd Eberly, a political scientist at St. Mary's College of Maryland, said Miller's diagnosis might cause some to look ahead to Miller's eventual successor. Miller has led with such strength for so long — astutely knowing when to push and when to build bridges — that such a conversation hasn't been necessary before, he said. As such, there's no obvious successor or senator who has been groomed for the position.

"You would never talk about it with regard to political vulnerability, because he didn't have political vulnerability," Eberly said.

"There may be a fear it's disrespectful to have the conversation," Eberly added. "But Mike Miller is a political animal and he's about managing politics. If there's anyone who can appreciate needing to have a conversation, it's him."

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Miller's counterpart in the House of Delegates, House Speaker Michael Busch of Anne Arundel County, also has had serious health issues. Busch, 72, had heart bypass surgery last fall and received a liver transplant in 2017 after being diagnosed with nonalcoholic steatohepatitis.

Pamela Wood

The Baltimore Sun



Pamela Wood covers Maryland politics from The Baltimore Sun's State House bureau in Annapolis. She's been with The Baltimore Sun since 2013, and previously wrote for The Capital, the Maryland Gazette, the Daily Times (Salisbury) and Gannett News Service. She grew up in Howard County and graduated from the University of Maryland.

Luke Broadwater



Luke Broadwater is a former State House reporter. Previously, he covered Baltimore City Hall, police and courts for a decade. Luke's investigative reporting is responsible for some of the biggest recent local news stories: prompting the resignation of a mayor; shuttering of hundreds of speed cameras; and \$4.4 billion more for public schools.

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