

# Kasemeyer, a 'powerful' senator, works largely out of the spotlight

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As a small group of state lawmakers struggled to come up with a budget agreement before the 2012 General Assembly session ended Monday, April 9, state Sen. Ed Kasemeyer, as usual, was in the room, leading the Senate contingent.

It was Kasemeyer, a Columbia Democrat and chairman of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee, who presented the compromise that last week breathed life into the negotiations. This week, it was Kasemeyer, the Senate's lead negotiator, who helped reach a compromise among the conference committee members.

And while that compromise dissolved in a cloud of finger-pointing and acrimony late Monday when lawmakers ended their regular session without approving a state budget, no one was faulting Kasemeyer.

"Absolutely not," said Del. Guy Guzzone, also a Columbia Democrat, who served as a non-voting member on the conference committees that struggled to come up with a budget agreement. "You have to realize, the conferees had all come to an agreement, and (Kasemeyer) was head of the Senate conferees."

In an interview before Monday's events, Guzzone said: "So many people can get wrapped up in their own personal hang-ups and issues and let that get in the way of accomplishing the bigger goal. He's not one of them. He understands what the bigger goal is. He understands the big picture of the budget."

Ed Kasemeyer is not like most political leaders in Annapolis. He is low-key, subdued and agreeable, and he doesn't get the headlines other power brokers in the General Assembly get.

"I'm a fairly quiet person," Kasemeyer said. "I don't need to say a lot. I've just never been a very high-profile individual. That's fine with me."

But anyone who knows Annapolis knows Kasemeyer.

"He's one of the most powerful senators" in the state, Howard County Executive Ken Ulman said, "arguably the second most powerful" after Senate President Mike Miller, the southern Maryland Democrat and a close Kasemeyer ally.

Kasemeyer's power, other elected officials say, comes from his position near the top of the Democratic leadership in the state Senate and from the respect he earns with his knowledge and his low-key persuasiveness.

"He has been a gentleman in his willingness to listen and to strike agreements and work together,"

Guzzone said. "He's just open to hear other people's sides and to act on them as he sees appropriately, but all in a good sense of cooperation."

County Council member Calvin Ball described Kasemeyer as "a thoughtful, pragmatic official" and "one of the most adept politicians at balancing competing interests."

The Columbia Democrat added: "He is a low-key man of substance; when it comes to Ed Kasemeyer, still waters run deep."

'A great underdog'

Kasemeyer, 66, has served 25 years in the state legislature.

He was first elected to the House of Delegates in 1982 to represent District 14B.

"I was a great underdog," Kasemeyer said. "No one thought I would win."

After his first four-year term, Kasemeyer was elected in 1986 as the state senator for District 14, which at the time encompassed parts of Howard and Montgomery counties.

In 1990, Kasemeyer narrowly lost his re-election bid to Republican Christopher McCabe. After redistricting put Kasemeyer in District 12, he ran again in 1994 and was elected to the Senate seat that he has held ever since.

When Kasemeyer returned to the Senate in 1995, he was assigned to the Budget and Taxation Committee. Over his 17 years serving on the committee, he's chaired several subcommittees, including a decade as chairman of the Pensions Subcommittee.

Though Kasemeyer said he always knew he wanted to move up in rank and had thought he "was a very capable individual," he attributes his rise to luck — and his ability to convince Miller he could depend on him.

"Everything that happens here is determined by the president," Kasemeyer said. "Competency alone doesn't get you very far."

At one point, Kasemeyer almost ruined his chances of winning the powerful Miller's trust. In 2000, he aligned himself with Baltimore County Democrat Sen. Thomas Bromwell, who tried to overthrow Miller.

"The vast majority of people thought I was going to be put out to Siberia career-wise," Kasemeyer said.

Miller said recently that he knew Kasemeyer was close to Bromwell but was unaware he was involved in any efforts to try to oust him. But had he known, Miller said, he wouldn't have held it against Kasemeyer.

"He's a very steady person," Miller said. "He's dedicated to his tasks at hand. He's very conscientious."

Kasemeyer never raises his voice, Miller said. But when he rises to speak, people listen.

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It was during former Gov. Robert Ehrlich's tenure, when he served as the Senate floor leader on the slots legislation, that Kasemeyer believes he started to convince Miller he could be a power in the legislature.

In 2007, following the resignation of Montgomery County Democrat Sen. Patrick Hogan, Miller named Kasemeyer as vice chairman of the Budget and Taxation Committee.

Then in 2010, when committee Chairman Sen. Ulysses Currie was indicted on bribery and other criminal charges, Miller promoted Kasemeyer to the post.

"He's been around for quite a while, so as a senior member and as a conscientious member, a thoughtful member, he was natural person" to assume the chairmanship, Miller said.

Sen. Allan Kittleman, a West Friendship Republican who has known Kasemeyer for decades, echoes some of the Democrats' comments.

"I could be biased because I've know him for many years and because my father (former state Sen. Bob Kittleman) had great respect for him, but I don't think I can think of one senator who ever told me he had a dislike of Sen. Kasemeyer," Kittleman said. "He's somebody who's willing to listen to all sides. He's approachable and he's fair."

Added Kittleman: "Certainly he will go along more with what the majority party wants ... but he will try to do the right thing."

'Career politician'

Republican Rick Martel, a Catonsville attorney who ran against Kasemeyer in 2010, is less enamored of Kasemeyer.

While he agreed that Kasemeyer is not as strident as some Democrats in Annapolis and that he holds "a very, very powerful position," Martel criticized Kasemeyer as a "career politician" not willing to make the tough decisions needed in the current lean economic times.

"I think Sen. Kasemeyer truly understands the gravity, the severity of our budget crisis ... and I think he also gets that people have had enough of tax increases," Martel said. "But I don't see where he's taken the lead in (rejecting tax increases). ... Leadership involves making very difficult decisions."

Kasemeyer, Martel said, "is not a leader but a follower. ... It's kind of like his MO is as long as it's business as usual, everything's fine."

He added: "I respect Ed Kasemeyer as a man. I just don't want him to be my senator anymore."

Despite his status as a seasoned and respected politician in Annapolis, Kasemeyer mostly flies under the radar. His name is rarely mentioned in the press, unless there are key decisions made on the budget.

Kasemeyer said he's never been one to draw attention.

"It's been that way all my life," he said.

Kasemeyer's subdued demeanor is one of the traits that has won him allies, both in Annapolis and in Howard County.

"He is incredibly well-thought-of and respected for his compassion," Ulman added. "He's just a very soft-spoken man who has good values and integrity."

"I get along with so many people," Kasemeyer said. "I think people trust me, and that's a wonderful thing. That's all you have here really. I've been able to create that."

Kasemeyer lives in Columbia with his wife Pam, a lobbyist in Annapolis, and his 12-year-old son. His four older children are grown.

Kasemeyer said he thinks he'll run again in 2014, when he is up for re-election. At one time, he had his eye on higher office — he even ran for governor for a few months in 1994, before deciding to pursue the District 12 Senate seat instead — but he said those dreams are largely gone.

"I think the only thing left is if the (Senate) president ever left, is to do that job," he said. "But I don't anticipate that happening. I think (Miller) will stay on."

Given his role leading a committee, Kasemeyer does not sponsor a lot of his own legislation. Mostly, his name can be found on bond bills for Howard and Baltimore counties, which he represents in District 12.

During the session, Kasemeyer admits he has less time to focus on the issues in District 12.

"Basically all day long you're consumed with budget issues," he said. "You have to rely on your staff with people in the district who need some help."

But from mid-April when the session ends to mid-January when it begins again, Kasemeyer is out in his district, attending various community meetings and addressing constituent concerns.

Even in his home community, however, Kasemeyer often flies under the radar.

"The average person on the street, I don't think knows; they don't know what role you have," he said. "But I really enjoy talking about my job if somebody did."