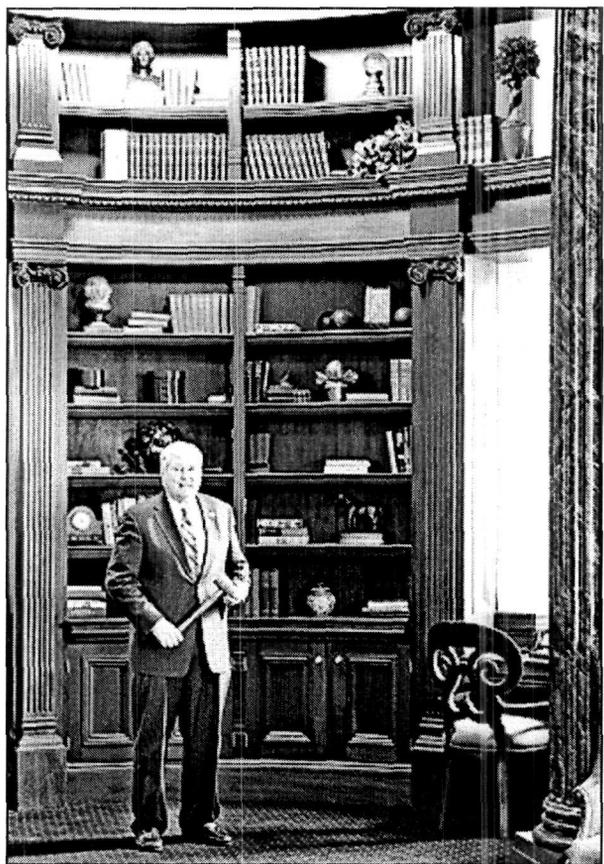


Busch longest-serving House speaker in Maryland history

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On Wednesday, House Speaker Michael Busch will become the longest-serving speaker in Maryland history.



Laura-Chase McGehee – The Capital

When the Maryland General Assembly kicks off its 430th session on Wednesday, Michael Busch will become the longest-serving speaker of the House of Delegates. The Annapolis Democrat said he walks a fine line trying to sway delegates for their votes while

The Annapolis resident is the 106th speaker, and the eighth from Anne Arundel County.

Busch, who has served in the House since January 1987, has become famous for his levelheaded approach to leading the diverse 141-member House of Delegates. Busch said he tries to persuade people but remains mindful of their beliefs.

"Abortion, death penalty, same-sex marriage - we have not pressured people. I am very careful not to ask anyone who is morally opposed to vote for or against anything," said Busch, 65. But "when all is said and done, I need 71 votes."

As speaker, Busch sees a nonstop line of delegates, citizens, reporters and lobbyists.

"He's so even-tempered," said Del. Pam Beidle, D-Linthicum.

"If I were him, I'd be strangling somebody. But not Mike. If you tell him you need to talk with him, he'll make the time."

Staff members say Busch sometimes does get angry or tired, but he keeps it to himself.

"I've known him since before he went into politics," said Edie Segree, one of his assistants. "I've seen him angry, but he doesn't take it out on us."

Busch has been an athlete and coach most of his life, and he has served as the head of youth athletics for the

respecting their beliefs.

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county's Department of Recreation and Parks for the past 33 years.

Members of the General Assembly say Busch's style is that of a coach. A speaker can punish members by putting them on committees they don't like, or withholding appointments to the ones they desire. Not Busch, members said.

Del. Ted Sophocleus, a conservative Democrat from Linthicum: "I have never felt pressured. There are no repercussions if you don't agree with Mike. He doesn't punish you."

Not everyone is as big a fan.

Del. Nic Kipke, R-Pasadena, said Busch is too partisan.

"I am told that in the past, presiding officers were much more bipartisan," Kipke said. "Busch couches himself as a coach, but I think it is coach of the Democratic Party."

County delegation chairman Del. Bob Costa, a Republican from Deale, has a more benign view.

Registered Democrats outnumber Republicans 2-to-1 statewide, Costa said, so the reality of Democrats holding the speaker's office is "guaranteed for the remainder of our lifetimes."

"Busch has kept his eye on his district," Costa said. "I think it's great the speaker is from Anne Arundel County, and the county benefits."

Del. Steve Schuh, a Republican from Gibson Island, said Busch is a natural leader.

"He just made the wrong team somewhere along the way and became a Democrat," Schuh said.