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*From the Baltimore Sun*

## Elephant, donkey, hogs and cows

### Rep. Wayne T. Gilchrest introduces Rep. Elijah E. Cummings to life on the Shore

By Gwyneth K. Shaw  
sun reporter

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KENNEDYVILLE -- Rep. Elijah E. Cummings had a question for hog farmer Jennifer Debnam as she handed him a plastic bag of boar semen.

"UPS delivers this?" he asked, warily.

"Yes, UPS or FedEx," Debnam replied as she held the tools used for artificially inseminating sows.

"I just did a tour the other morning of UPS," said Cummings, with a chortle. "Now, I have a new appreciation for them."

It's less than a two-hour drive from Democrat Cummings' Baltimore district to this Eastern Shore town. But it was Cummings' first trip to Kent County, and his host, fellow Rep. Wayne T. Gilchrest, was determined to show his urban friend the highlights of rural life.

Despite party differences - Gilchrest is a Republican - the two have struck up a friendship on Capitol Hill. So in the interest of strengthening that bond, and reaping some mutually beneficial media attention, Cummings came to Gilchrest's home turf yesterday for an unusual fact-finding tour.

Armed with doughnuts and coffee, they set out yesterday in a rented van, with a handful of staffers in tow. They dropped in on an elementary school class in Chestertown, then headed into farm country.

Along the way, Cummings peppered Gilchrest with questions about the area, which remains an oasis of agriculture and open spaces. As they drove past brilliant fields of green winter wheat, Gilchrest explained the pressures that farmers face from developers willing to pay huge sums for property that, in many cases, has been farmed by the same family for more than a century.

Their first visit, to Howard McHenry's dairy operation, offered a prominent example: Across the two-lane highway from the Kennedyville farm, bulldozers sat on what is to become a major housing development.

Gilchrest and Cummings donned plastic booties - a defense against the spread of disease, and a way to keep manure off their shoes - as McHenry explained how his business works. He bought the farm in 1969, with his father and brother, and while he said he'd like to see the price of milk go up a bit, he said he has no plans to sell.

Cummings said he planned to hold McHenry to his word.

"I don't want to come back here in five years and see all these big houses here," he said.

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By the time he finished touring a second dairy nearby, this one owned by the Horizon Organic Dairy, Cummings' crisp dress shirt had a few smudges - most likely from squeezing through a narrow fence gap to reach the cow barn - and his pants were streaked with dust. But under the brim of his Coast Guard cap, the Baltimore native grinned.

Joked Gilchrest, "When Elijah and I retire, we're going to have our own farm."

More immediately, they're hatching a plan for Gilchrest to pay a reciprocal visit to Baltimore soon, perhaps as early as next month.

Beyond their differing constituencies, the two Maryland lawmakers make something of an odd couple in other ways. Gilchrest is habitually soft-spoken, while Cummings' gravelly voice booms. And their respective political parties could not be more hostile toward each other.

But both said they recognize the value of having a friend in the other party, a potential ally in tough times. And while Cummings didn't get to take one of Gilchrest's famous canoe tours yesterday, he did stand atop a bluff overlooking the spot where the Sassafra River empties into the Chesapeake Bay - an experience Gilchrest called "political dialysis."

The magnificent spot is part of the Sassafra River Natural Resource Management Area, an old farm that is owned by the state and open to the public. Gilchrest's home is close to the entrance, and he has several favorite spots. But he worries that the old lodge on the property will fall down before anyone finds the money to fix it.

So he leaned forward to make a tongue-in-cheek suggestion to his friend that the project get federal funding.

"Maybe we can have an earmark, Elijah," he said.

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**[gwyneth.shaw@baltsun.com](mailto:gwyneth.shaw@baltsun.com)**

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