

New Annapolis Legislators: They're Serious, Professional and 'Not ...

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The Washington Post (1974-); Jan 14, 1987; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post

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ANNAPOLIS—When Paul Pinsky, a Prince George's County Democrat, is sworn in as a member of the Maryland House of Delegates today, he expects to have little trouble negotiating the maze of tunnels under the State House or the legislative arcana that have stymied previous generations of freshmen lawmakers.

As president of the county teachers union, the 36-year-old Pinsky has been lobbying and observing the General Assembly for more than three years.

Similarly, C. Lawrence Wiser, 56, served Montgomery County as a state senator for four years before be-

ing defeated in a reelection bid in 1978. He returns to Annapolis to start the 90-day legislative session as a House member.

The two are members of a freshman class that Annapolis veterans are calling unusually well versed in both the substance and style of state government.

This year, eight newcomers will join the 47-member Senate and 42 new faces will appear in the ranks of the 141-member House. In Montgomery County, about half of the 28 county lawmakers are new or returning in a different job.

The freshmen are the best educated, most politically experienced and least flamboyant in years, according to veterans. The latter quality especially seems to be ap-

preciated by legislative leaders, who generally view a flair for the dramatic, however effective on the campaign trail, as something best left behind at the capital city limits.

"I'm very impressed with them. They're very serious and they all want to get to work," said third-term Del. Charles (Buzz) Ryan (D-Prince George's), the chairman of the House Appropriations Committee.

As an example, said Ryan, "every one of the freshmen from Prince George's County during the month of November came down to talk to me, and not about politics, but about procedure—the process, how to get their office organized, what to look for"

Gone, Ryan suspects, are freshmen who draw scorn

from their colleagues for their unrestrained individualism. Montgomery County Republican Robin Ficker, for example, entered the annals of legislative lore when he once held up passage of the state budget for two days by introducing 130 amendments, none of which was adopted.

Ryan also has not seen a likely replacement for such free spirits as Prince George's Del. Thomas Mooney, a Democrat turned Republican, who was known in part for quoting existentialist philosophers in debates on local zoning bills. Ficker met defeat in 1982 and Mooney gave up his seat last year to make an unsuccessful bid for governor on the GOP ticket.

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New Annapolis Legislators Are Seen as Serious and Professional

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This year's freshman class is dominated by newcomers such as Democrat Gilbert J. Genn, 34, a Montgomery County lawyer, who called the legislature "one of the most expeditious avenues for social change," and Peter Franchot, 38, also a Montgomery Democrat, who called being a delegate "the natural progression from the work I'd been doing" as a congressional staff director and "a chance to get into the nuts and bolts of state government."

Not everyone lauds the changes.

"It's the yuppification of the legislature," said Mooney, who attributes what he called the increased professionalism of the freshmen to the sharply increased cost of campaigns.

"I kind of see it as the end of idealism. It's like Congress: Only the wealthy need apply."

Ficker, who lost a state Senate bid in the fall, said the newcomers are too concerned about fitting in, to the detriment of the legislative process.

"It's gotten to the point where anyone who debates an issue on the floor is looked at askance," he said.

But that opinion is not the prevailing one. Said Sen.-elect Albert R. Wynn (D-Prince George's), a former delegate: "There has been a tremendous improvement in overall quality."

"These are not stooges. These are not just party regulars who were handpicked because they've gone along and written the checks. All of them have excellent credentials and a seriousness of purpose that has been noticeably lacking in the past."

Most lawmakers attribute the differences to the times. Typically, large changes in the character of the legislature accompany a change in administrations. Ryan said the

last time there was such a profound change in the character of the legislature was in 1978.

"It was the first [statewide] election after Watergate. You had a genuine negative feeling toward politics and politicians," Ryan said, and many people were inspired to run by what they opposed. By the 1986 election, he said, more positive feelings about the process seem to have returned, attracting more competition and what he considers better-qualified candidates.

State Senate President-designate Thomas V. Mike Miller Jr., a Prince George's Democrat, said the increasing professionalism of the legislature is a national trend, sparked by higher salaries and the increased role of state lawmakers in formulating social policy in areas from which the federal government has withdrawn.

With all their credentials, whether the freshmen will have any lasting impact as a group remains un-

clear. Indications are that they are trying: Already a small Prince George's-based group led by Pinsky and Del.-elect James Rosapepe, both Democrats, has begun working on a proposal to revise the state income tax to make it more progressive. Franchot said one of his aims is to monitor the effect of the federal budget on Maryland, especially on services for children.

And several of the Montgomery County freshmen, many of whom campaigned on promises to be more responsive to the county's fiscal needs, have requested briefings on the complicated funding formulas that dictate the flow of state dollars to the jurisdictions.

What is certain is that they have altered the demographic profile of the legislature: The black caucus has increased by three, to 27, and the women's caucus has 41 members, an increase of five.

Moreover, the 47-member Senate, which has never had more than

three women members, will have six this year. And the number of educators in the legislature is on the rise, according to legislative leaders, along with the number of lawyers, which had been on the decline.

Senate President Miller, a Civil War buff and lawyer who began his career in Annapolis drafting bills, sees in the changes one of the paradoxes of history: "The good news is they're more professional. The bad news is we're losing a lot of common ordinary folk with common ordinary experiences to help us as a legislature make better decisions."

On the bright side, said Miller, one thing remains: Freshmen as a source of humor. The first thing one new senator did was to demand a seat on the most influential committee, said Miller, who makes those decisions. His second demand was for an office close to the committee room. And the third, Miller recounted, was for a special parking space.
