

Liberals Fight Back

Babington, Charles;Michael Abramowitz Washington Post Staff Writer

The Washington Post (1974-); Aug 17, 1995; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post
pg. MD1B

MARYLAND NOTEBOOK

Liberals Fight Back

By Charles Babington
and Michael Abramowitz

Washington Post Staff Writers

Swimming against the conservative tide, several Maryland legislators are seeking money and ideas for a "citizens' agenda" that would push liberal solutions back to the forefront of political debate.

Leaders of the group predict that many Marylanders will embrace such notions as building new schools rather than prisons and slapping heavier taxes on wealthy people and rejecting tax breaks for industries.

"I think a lot of people have read the last election wrong, and even among Democrats the response has been to do what they think is on people's minds," said Sen. Paul G. Pinsky (D-Prince George's), a leader of the budding endeavor, which lacks a formal name. When people who make \$20,000 or \$30,000 a year vote Republican, he said, it's clear that the Democratic Party needs new direction.

"If you lowered taxes for the people making \$10,000 to \$40,000 a

See NOTEBOOK, Page 2, Col. 4

Reviving the Liberal Tradition

NOTEBOOK, From Page 1

year and raised it for those making \$500,000, I think a lot of people who are frustrated with the Democrats and who voted Republican would say, 'Yeah, I could support that,' " Pinsky said.

Noting that the General Assembly gave tax breaks this year to business and other business groups, he said that a better use of state revenue would be "to create jobs, à la [President Franklin] Roosevelt in the 1930s."

Pinsky, one of the state Senate's most liberal members, said his group is in its infancy and has made a few requests for grants to help sponsor seminars and a possible publication.

"We'd like to foster some dialogue among advocates, academics," he said, "to bring together some kind of coherent agenda." The process is likely to take a few years, he said, assuming it gets off the ground at all. "A lot of the ideas will come from the communities and the streets," he said.

Del. Salima Siler Marriott (D-Baltimore) also is active in the effort, which she said "has not really taken off in terms of anything formal."

"Democrats who are progressive," she said, "have to make our statements to keep the party from getting more conservative." She said the group has circulated a "position paper," drafted in part by Del. Rushern L. Baker III (D-Prince George's).

Some moderate and conservative Democrats in the General Assembly give the effort little chance of blooming. With Democratic Gov. Parris N. Glendening barely winning last fall's election, they say, the party is under pressure to shed any image of being hostile to businesses and affluence.

Pinsky, however, says rushing pell-mell to the right is not the answer.

"The debate has shifted so far to the right that alternatives are off the radar screen," he said. Now is the time for a new agenda that will "run counter to the Contract with America" made famous by congressional Republicans.

BG&E to Leave Glendening Critics

In what could be a sign of internal turmoil in the Maryland business community, a Baltimore utility plans to drop its membership in Maryland Business for Responsive Government, a hard-edged advocacy group that often has locked horns with Gov. Parris N. Glendening (D).

A spokesman for Baltimore Gas & Electric Co. says the company plans to drop out of MBRG as part of a budget-cutting strategy.

"We're trying to cut our costs," said the spokesman, Art Slusark. "We're already heavily involved with the Maryland Chamber of Commerce and also the Greater Baltimore Committee, which does very similar work."

According to MBRG officials, the cost of membership can range from a few hundred dollars to \$15,000 annually, depending on the size of the company. The group has about 100 corporate members, they said.

The BG&E move, however, may have more to do with the reality that MBRG is not "politically correct" these days, as an Annapolis lobbyist says, referring to the group's rocky relationship with Glendening and senior Democrats in the General Assembly.

Unlike the chamber, which has cultivated a cooperative relationship with the administration, MBRG takes a more adversarial approach, blasting the governor and the legislature regularly for their purported failure to make Maryland a "pro-business" state. The group also endorsed Glendening's Republican rival last November, former House of Delegates minority leader Ellen R. Sauerbrey. And it issues an annual report card on individual legislators—a move that some said infuriated former House speaker R. Clayton Mitchell Jr., who happens to be BG&E's top lobbyist now.

Robert O.C. Worcester, MBRG's president, said he remains hopeful that the gas and electric company, one of the charter members of his business group, will reconsider the move.

"As far as I'm concerned," he said, "I would not say this is a *fait accompli*."