

## The Never-Ending Quest for Campaign Cash

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# *The Never-Ending Quest for Campaign Cash*

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**F**or the past month, Maryland lawmakers have been agonizing over ethics legislation. A few of them don't want to give up free meals from lobbyists, which would be banned under the proposal. But that's chicken feed compared with another potential source of conflicts that can leave the public grumbling about money-grubbing, out-of-touch politicians: campaign contributions.

With the cost of state legislative races escalating, lawmakers and their challengers constantly have their hands out for contributions. There was just an election in November. There won't be another one for four years, and yet in January—before the General Assembly session began and fund-raising must temporarily cease—more than a dozen legislators had breakfasts, dinners and cocktail parties soliciting contributions.

*Critics of this seemingly never-ending quest for*

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# Public Financing of Elections Proposed in Legislature

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cash say there is another way: public financing of elections. There are two proposals in the legislature now, though even proponents of the idea acknowledge that they don't have a great chance in a General Assembly enamored of the status quo.

"We can talk ethics all we want, but that's really tinkering at the edges," said Sen. **Paul G. Pinsky** (D-Prince George's). "Ethics becomes very small against an effort that would create a fire wall against big money contributors."

As he did unsuccessfully last year, **Pinsky** is proposing that legislative candidates receive state money to finance their campaigns. Under his bill, which had a hearing last week, a House candidate would have to raise \$2,000 and a Senate candidate \$5,000 in contributions of no more than \$100 to qualify for state funding. In exchange, the candidates would agree to a spending cap—receiving up to \$35,000 for House races, \$80,000 for Senate races.

There's a similar House effort, with slightly different dollar amounts, sponsored by Majority Leader **John A. Hurson** (D-Montgomery). He calls it an effort to "restore sanity to the process."

Groups such as the NAACP, the League of Women Voters and Common Cause are backing the proposals. "It is the only way we can see to effectively break open Maryland's election system," said Common Cause's Maryland Executive Director **Kathleen Skullney**.

The current system favors incumbents in a state dominated by Democrats and allows the strong influence of legislative leaders and other powerful incumbents, who receive more money than they need and therefore are able to pass money on to other candidates as a way of increasing their power.

Maryland already has public financing of gubernatorial races—not that it's used much. The amount of money available varies because it comes from a fund paid for through a checkoff on the state income tax form. Last year, Gov. **Parris N. Glendening** (D) and Republican challenger **Ellen R. Sauerbrey** ignored public financing because they could raise more money on their own.

But **Skullney** said the legislative proposals are more attractive because the money would come from the state general fund and would not be subject to whether there was enough money raised from income tax checkoffs. Candidates also would be allowed to have the cap doubled if they are facing a big-spending opponent who isn't taking public money.

**Pinsky's** proposal would cost \$20 million over four years. "That's a \$5 million appropriation out of a \$17 billion [annual] budget," **Skullney** said. She says she believes that if lawmakers would agree to put it up for

referendum, voters would bite.

## Ehrlich's Two-Part Party

You could say Rep. **Robert L. Ehrlich Jr.** (R-Md.) is indecisive, or you could say he's just covering his bases.

Either way, the rising Republican is out to raise a lot of cash with a fund-raiser set for Monday at the Marriott Hotel at Baltimore-Washington International Airport. The first 90 minutes of the fund-raiser, a cocktail party, will be for donors who want to contribute under Maryland state campaign finance laws; tickets are \$1,500 a couple. The second half, complete with a swing band in another section of the hotel, will be for those who are forking over money under federal laws. It will cost \$500 a couple.

His advisers pointedly note that the BWI Marriott is outside his congressional district—a sign of a bigger vision. Ehrlich is clearly and unabashedly ambitious but unsure of what other job he might seek.

Does he make a run for governor in four years (see: those contributing under Maryland law)? Or, does he maybe take a shot at unseating U.S. Sen. **Paul S. Sarbanes**, a popular Democrat who has indicated that he probably will seek reelection (see: those contributing under federal laws)? Or does Ehrlich just wait it all out for a while and run again for his House seat, which is safely his for the keeping with its conservative corners of Baltimore and Harford counties (see: ditto)?

"We're going to raise money to back up [all] options," Ehrlich said.

Along with GOP state Chairman **Richard D. Bennett**, a former U.S. attorney who was **Sauerbrey's** running mate last year, Ehrlich is part of a pair of Republicans who state political watchers say have the visibility to mount big-time, ambitious campaigns.

Earlier this week, about \$100,000 in contributions was already on hand, Ehrlich said, meaning that he already had raised more in advance of Monday's event than he had ever raised in a previous fund-raiser. By the time the night is over, Ehrlich said, he hoped to have raised more than \$600,000 in both federal and state money.

As for when he will make up his mind: "It's an ongoing process. We have a self-imposed deadline of early November."

## Shriver for Congress?

Supporters are fanning speculation that another Kennedy may run for Congress—two-term Maryland Del. **Mark K. Shriver** (D-Montgomery), nephew of John F. Kennedy and son of **Sargent and Eunice Shriver**.

**Shriver**, 35, an executive of a Bethesda technology start-up firm, demurred last week but didn't rule out a challenge to popular

Rep. **Constance A. Morella** (R-Md.).

His biggest booster, first cousin Rep. **Patrick J. Kennedy** (D-R.I.), happens to be the chairman of the Democrats' drive to retake the House in 2000. The pair lunched at Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee headquarters in December, as **Morella** contemplated a Senate bid.

"Congressman Kennedy certainly would encourage his cousin to run," DCCC spokesman **Erik Smith** said, "as he would encourage any qualified candidate to run in that district." A Shriver campaign associate said Montgomery County Democrats are talking about raising \$1 million for him. **Shriver** said for now his focus is Annapolis.

"A Democratic voice and a Democratic majority is critically important, it would make a big difference" on Capitol Hill, said **Shriver**, who could campaign while keeping his state delegate's seat, which is not up for election until 2002. "You never, obviously, say never."

**Morella** won election to her seventh term in November, winning 60 percent of the vote against **Ralph G. Neas** (D), who spent about \$800,000 and is interested in running again.

## Marketing University of Maryland

Six months into his new job, University of Maryland at College Park President **C. Daniel Mote** said he has been surprised that the school does not have more visibility on the East Coast.

Mote told members of the Prince George's County General Assembly delegation last week that he intends to increase marketing of the school to generate more exposure for the university, which ranks 16th in the country for the number of students who graduate with a PhD.

That was all fine with the delegates, but what they really wanted to talk about was those Terps, the men's basketball team that remains in the hunt for a national championship.

Del. **Anne Healey** (D-Prince George's) moved that the men's basketball team make it to the Final Four. She quickly found a second.

"The Terps are wonderful," Mote said. "When your biggest problem is whether they are a No. 1 seed [in the NCAA basketball tournament] or a No. 2 seed, you don't have much of a problem."

Mote said his biggest thrill since coming to College Park was when senior forward **Laron Profit** chose to have his picture taken with the president.

He also noted that the Terps have the highest SAT scores of any basketball team in the Atlantic Coast Conference, which got a loud round of applause from the delegates, who suggested Mote share that information on the House floor where some of their Duke colleagues are reportedly in need of a little ego-deflation.