

BCPS Superintendent Hairston to meet with Annapolis lawmakers in Towson

By Steve Schuster
Posted: May 11, 2011

State legislators representing the county and Baltimore County Public Schools Superintendent Joe Hariston have agreed to meet on May 31, at 4 p.m. at BCPS's Greenwood Campus in Towson to discuss issues ranging from teacher salaries and staffing to [school craft fairs \(the use of school grounds by outside vendors\)](#).

Back in April, after state legislators had raised questions about these issues, Hairston had been expected to address them at a Board of Education meeting, but did not.

A few days later, Hairston met with legislators in Annapolis — though that meeting was essentially closed to the public. The superintendent met with Senate and House delegation chairs Sen. Kathy Klausmeier and Del. John Olszewski Jr. over [breakfast](#), which annoyed some legislators.

Sen. Jim Brochin, who represents the District 42, which includes Towson, said at the time that, "I am very disappointed they met without the entire delegation. ... He (Hariston) has to answer to the entire legislative body, and that didn't happen."

At the April 8 breakfast, Hariston agreed to reconvene with legislators in a more public forum in 30 days, which would have been May 8. May 31 perhaps will satisfy that meeting.

But will this meeting be open to the public?

In a May 11 email to the Towson Times, Charles Herndon, spokesman for the school system, said he was not sure, "as it is the delegates' meeting, even though we are hosting. You may want to check with members of the delegation."

That same day, Del. Olszewski informed the Towson Times that the meeting would be open to anyone who wishes to attend. "Yes, open to all," Olszewski said.

Also on Wednesday, Brochin said his chief concern at the meeting will be: Why are teacher positions being eliminated through vacancies and attrition when administrators are not?

"One hundred and ninety-six 196 teachers aren't going to be teaching next year who are an integral part of the school system ... when hundreds of administrative positions aren't being eliminated through attrition. I think it should be the opposite," Brochin said Wednesday.

As we previously noted, [Baltimore County Public Schools spends \\$1,591,247 annually in salaries](#) for nine superintendents. That amount includes Hairston (\$307,872), new Deputy Superintendent Renee Foose (\$214,000) and seven assistant superintendents.

It was the hiring of Foose that prompted elected officials — both in Towson and Annapolis — to raise the salary issue.

The 4 p.m. May 31 meeting will be held at the Greenwood Campus - 6901 North Charles Street in Towson — in Boardroom A of the main BCPS building.

This blog has been updated.

[Comment on this entry](#) • [No responses](#)

Deer hunting, car towing and budget at County Council work session

By Steve Schuster
Posted: April 26, 2011

The proposal by 3rd District County Council member Todd Huff to allow controlled deer hunting in some county parks is expected to be discussed at Tuesday's County Council work session in Towson.

Huff, a Republican who represents the northern part of the county, introduced the bill April 4, and at the time said deer are spreading Lyme disease, destroying vegetation and causing major car accidents.

Republican and 5th District Councilman David Marks, who represents Towson and Perry Hall, is co-sponsoring the bill.

Also, 1st District Council member Tom Quirk, who represents Catonsville and Arbutus, said Monday that he intends to discuss a measure at the next work session (May 17) — that would expand Baltimore County Police's authority to tow vehicles that are blocking driveways.

Under current law, police are not allowed to tow vehicles for that issue, and often have to wait and try to locate the driver, said Quirk, a Democrat.

"The new law would just refine the existing towing rules," he said.

After the regularly scheduled work session at 2 p.m. (on April 26), a budget overview presentation at 3 p.m. will also be held, at Historic Court House, 400 Washington Ave., Towson.

Then, at 7 p.m., a public hearing on the budget will be held in the council chambers, in the Historic Courthouse.

For those who wish to mark their calendars, don't forget that after Tuesday's budget overview, the council will host a series of departmental budget reviews. The full schedule is below:

FY 2012 BUDGET SCHEDULE

APRIL 26 TUESDAY

2:00 pm — WORK SESSION
3:00 pm — BUDGET OVERVIEW
7:00 pm — BUDGET HEARING (COUNCIL CHAMBERS)

MAY 2 MONDAY

2:00 pm — SHERIFF
2:30 pm — INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
3:00 pm — PERMITS, APPROVALS, & INSPECTIONS
7:00 pm — LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MAY 5 THURSDAY

2:00 pm — FIRE
2:30 pm — CORRECTIONS
3:00 pm — ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION and SUSTAINABILITY

MAY 10 TUESDAY

2:00 pm — PLANNING
2:30 pm — LIBRARY
3:00 pm — RECREATION & PARKS
3:30 pm — PUBLIC WORKS
4:00 pm — CAPITAL BUDGET/DEBT SERVICE

MAY 12 THURSDAY

2:00 pm — POLICE
2:30 pm — COMMUNITY COLLEGE
3:00 pm — ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
3:30 pm — ORGANIZATIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS
4:00 pm — RETIREMENT
4:30 pm — INSURANCE

MAY 17 TUESDAY

2:00 pm — WORK SESSION
3:00 pm — EDUCATION
4:00 pm — BUDGET DELIBERATIONS

MAY 23 MONDAY
SEND BUDGET MESSAGE TO PRINTER

The County Council is then expected to vote on the budget adoption at a Thursday, May 26, meeting, at 10 a.m.

[Comment on this entry](#) • [No responses](#)

Superintendent salaries continue as hot topic for officials and readers

By Steve Schuster
Posted: April 21, 2011



Salary Chart

[Baltimore County Public Schools](#) spends \$1,591,247 annually in salaries for nine superintendents. That amount includes Superintendent Joe Hairston (\$307,872), new Deputy Superintendent Renee Foose (\$214,000) and seven assistant superintendents.

You may recall that recently, we published a story and chart comparing the salaries of upper administrators in local school systems ([see chart](#)). The story generated some interest with officials — and with readers, who asked us to follow up on a few additional aspects.

As always, we appreciate the feedback, and here are some answers:

- One reader noted that in addition to a superintendent and deputy superintendent, Baltimore County Public Schools also has several assistant superintendents. True enough. We generally tried to initially compare the top positions only — because after those top few positions, different systems call titles of positions differently — but here's the additional "superintendent" posts in Baltimore County:

In addition to Hairston and Foose, BCPS has seven assistant superintendents. They are:

1. Karen Blannard – Assistant Superintendent Zone 1 – Elementary Schools - \$152,491
2. Patricia Lawton - Assistant Superintendent Zone 2 – Elementary Schools - \$152,491
3. Verletta White - Assistant Superintendent Zone 3 – Elementary Schools - \$152,491
4. Manuel Rodriguez - Assistant Superintendent – Middle Schools - \$153,491
5. Barbara Walker – Assistant Superintendent – High Schools - \$152,491
6. Roger Plunkett - Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction - \$152,491
7. Donald Peccia – Assistant Superintendent Dept. of Human Resources - \$153,429

- Next, a few readers asked us to add Prince George's County and Montgomery County to our jurisdictional comparison. Ask and you shall receive ... well, at least in this case:

The Prince George's County Public Schools Office of Communications tells us the following:

Superintendent's salary - \$250,000.

Deputy Superintendent - \$189,870

Five Assistant Superintendents - earn between \$123,063 and 172,289.

There are 198 schools and 127,000 students in Prince George's County.

The Montgomery County Public Schools Communications Office tells us the following:

Superintendent's salary - \$216,792

Chief Operating Officer - \$202,540

Deputy Superintendent - \$202,540

Chief School Performance Officer (oversees six community superintendents) - \$178,686

Community Superintendents (six of them) - \$162,623

Associate Superintendents (five of them) - \$162,623

Montgomery County Public Schools has 200 schools in its system and 144,064 students.

Foose's salary continues to spark discussion

It was the hiring of Foose at a \$214,000 salary that prompted county elected officials — both in Towson and Annapolis — to raise the salary issue, especially at a time of cutbacks within the school system and the transfer of some teachers to fill vacant positions.

Foose was earning \$162,623 as an associate superintendent with Montgomery County Public Schools when Baltimore County hired her, according to Dana Tofig, a spokesman for the Montgomery County system.

She was employed with MCPS from 2006-2011. She was the principal of Earle B. Wood Middle School (2006-08), then worked as director of school performance for a cluster of schools (2008-09). Foose then served as director of the Office of Shared Accountability (2009-10), and was an associate superintendent from July 2010 to April 2011, when she resigned to take the BCPS post.

Recently, Hairston had a private breakfast meeting at the Annapolis Marriott with Sen. Kathy Klausmeier and Del. John Olsewski Jr. to discuss issues related to the Foose hiring (as well as other issues such as the commercial vendor policy regarding craft fairs — [rule 1300](#)). Hairston is expected to respond to legislators' concerns within 30 days.

This week, County Council chairman [Johnny Olsewski Sr.](#) said he will also [sit down with Hairston](#) sometime in the next week to address similar concerns raised by the council. "I was just as shocked as anyone else when he (Hairston) hired the deputy superintendent (Foose) at the tune of \$214,000 plus benefits. We will see if he listens to what we have to say or if he turns a deaf ear," Olsewski Sr. told the Towson Times on Tuesday.

One final note — it would also appear that although Foose signed on with BCPS for a salary of \$214,000, the position was initially advertised at \$194,000.

The website where the listing was advertised no longer has it posted. But, here's an image of the original [Deputy Superintendent ad](#).

Baltimore County Public Schools officials were not available for comment this week because of the BCPS spring break.

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After the session, Morhaim talks medical marijuana, McDonough talks immigration

*By Steve Schuster
Posted: April 16, 2011*

Confetti and balloons flew from the galley of the senate

chambers in the State House at 12:01 a.m. this past Tuesday morning to close the 90-day legislative session of the [Maryland General Assembly](#).

The General Assembly is expected to reconvene in a special session this September to address several issues including redistricting and [transportation funds](#).

But in the meantime, Gov. Martin O'Malley will sign (or opt not to sign), hundreds of pieces of legislation the assembly passed over the past three months.

Among those bills — one regarding the use of marijuana for medicinal purposes.

Democrat and [Delegate Dan Morhaim](#), who represents the 11th District which includes Owings Mills, saw a compromise reached on the medical marijuana issue.

The delegate - the only medical doctor in the General Assembly - introduced legislation that would have legalized the use of marijuana as medicine.

[As noted previously on ExploreBaltimoreCounty.com](#), the bill would have allowed marijuana to be obtained and used only for medical purposes - namely for patients suffering from certain chronic illnesses that produce severe pain, nausea or seizures.

Critics included [Dr. Joshua Sharfstein](#), Maryland's secretary of health and mental hygiene, who said the cost to implement the bill, "would easily reach at least several million dollars." Sharfstein also said the law, as drafted, did not provide enough limits on which doctors could recommend marijuana for medical uses; the conditions when marijuana could be recommended; the number of dispensaries; the duration of treatment; or the quantity of the drug to be given.

Still, [house bill \(291\)](#) and [senate bill \(308\)](#) passed after several amendments. Under the revised language, Maryland will become the 16th state to remove criminal penalties for the use of marijuana for medical purposes, according to a release issued by the [Marijuana Policy Project](#) provided to the Towson Times by Del. Morhaim.

Under the new law, patients diagnosed with a "debilitating medical condition" could elude criminal prosecution if arrested for the use or possession of one ounce or less of marijuana.

The bill would also require the establishment of a "work group" comprised of medical, legal, and law enforcement officials to recommend additional legislation next year.

Now the ball is in O'Malley's court, and according to an e-mail this week from O'Malley spokesman Shaun Adamec, the governor will sign the bill into law.

The bill had several Baltimore County sponsors including Sen. [J.B. Jennings](#) (Republican, District 7), [Sen. Delores Kelley](#) (Democrat, District 10), [Del. Bobby Zirkin](#) (Democrat, District 11), and Sen. [Katherine Klausmier](#) (Democrat - District 8).

"Progress comes in small steps," Morhaim said this past week. "I'm pleased we made progress, but there is more to do."

Morhaim said another bill, [house bill 286](#), dealing with medical malpractice - standard of care issues - was a success too. He said the legislation was introduced in the wake of the [recent Dr. Mark Midei litigation regarding stent procedures at St. Joseph Medical Center](#).

"This bill sets out objective standards for physician performance evaluations ... and makes sure procedures are done for the right reasons," Morhaim said in an interview with the Towson Times on Wednesday.

The bill passed the House on April 7 (unanimously 136-0) and passed the Senate on April 6 (unanimously 46-0).

McDonough says immigration issue not over

While Morhaim saw some success and additional work to be done on the medical front in Annapolis, a Baltimore County Republican says he's still prepared to wage a battle - in court - over a bill allowing in-state tuition provision for some illegal immigrants.

Republican Annapolis [Delegate Pat McDonough](#) who represents the 7th District in Baltimore County and a piece of Harford County, said this week he's consulted with two "major national legal foundations" regarding a lawsuit against the recently passed Maryland in-state tuition for illegal immigrants, otherwise known as the "Dream Act." McDonough was one several Annapolis delegates who fought the passage of the "[Dream Act](#)" in the General Assembly, and McDonough also crafted more than a dozen bills regarding illegal immigration this past session.

In a release, the delegate said he believes the "Dream Act" violates federal immigration law and conflicts with the U.S. Constitution.

"Maryland has become a Disneyland for illegal immigrants, providing attractions and free rides and is costing taxpayers billions of dollars," he said in the release. "The in-state tuition act will make things much worse, attracting more illegal immigrants.

He said, the legislators, (mostly Democrats) who support The Dream Act, "are advocates for illegal immigrants, promoting amnesty and sanctuary policies. For those reasons, I must take the peoples' cause into the judicial system to seek justice."

McDonough told the [Towson Times](#) that on partisan issues, "There is a massive philosophical difference between the Democrats and the Republicans," and that while House of Delegate Democrats have 98 votes, Republicans only have 43.

"So, we play defense a lot," McDonough said.

But with litigation looming, it would appear the lawmaker also knows how to play a bit of offense, too.

Comment on this entry • No responses

No comments at board session, but Hairston to break bread with delegation chairs Friday

By *Steve Schuster*
Posted: April 6, 2011



Dr. Joe Hairston BCPS Superintendent

Baltimore County Public Schools Superintendent [Joe Hairston](#) had been expected to address issues ranging from salaries and teacher transfers to [Rule 1300](#) at the Board of Education meeting Tuesday night in Towson.

He did not. In a brief superintendent's report, Hairston did not discuss the salary, teacher staffing, or rule 1300 issues.

However, Earnest [Hines, school board president](#), did speak a bit about Rule 1300 — the controversial policy that prohibits commercial vendors from leasing space at schools during craft fairs and other events — and reiterated that the rule is being taken back to the BCPS Policy Committee for review.

Several parents spoke about the matter, too, expressing the view that school system should allow broader use of school facilities for community functions [pursuant to Maryland law](#).

"The board should have insisted long ago that the superintendent and BCPS staff comply with Maryland state law, which mandates that local county school boards must encourage the use of school facilities by non-school groups," said [Laurie Taylor-Mitchell, a Towson resident and BCPS parent](#).

Hairston may not have spoken much on Tuesday, but he is expected to meet with legislators in Annapolis on Friday — though that meeting will essentially be closed to the public. The superintendent is scheduled to meet with county Senate and House delegation chairs Sen. Kathy Klausmeier and Del. John Olszewki Jr. over breakfast, according to an e-mail received by the Towson Times from [Olszewski](#).

"Chairman Klausmeier and I are meeting with Superintendent Hairston this coming Friday morning over breakfast to discuss the letter we recently sent to him. ... I will also poll members of my Delegation to see if there are other issues that they would like to have addressed at this meeting," Olszewski wrote in the email.

He noted in the email that, "The meeting structure is at the preference of the superintendent."

As we previously reported here at Strange Bedfellows, the hiring of Renee Foose, a new deputy superintendent who will make \$214,000 annually, prompted legislators to request information from Hairston about the hiring.

In a March 18 letter to Hairston, [Klausmeier](#) and [Olszewski](#) requested a "speedy reply" from the superintendent.

"We are hoping to get an answer as to why that money is being expended in administration costs at a time when we are reducing our front-line teaching staff," Olszewski said last week.

Stay tuned.

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Hairston in Towson, but will he be in Annapolis?

By *Steve Schuster*
Posted: April 5, 2011

Officials in Annapolis say Baltimore County Public Schools Superintendent [Joe Hairston](#) is tentatively slated to meet with them Friday to discuss issues ranging from salaries and teacher transfers to [rule 1300](#).

A school spokesman could not confirm that meeting, but said the superintendent will discuss his response to legislators' concerns with the school board on Tuesday.

Last month, the hiring of Renee Foose, a new deputy superintendent who will make \$214,000 annually, prompted legislators to request information from Hairston about the hiring.

In a letter to Hairston, [State Sen. Kathy Klausmeier](#) and [Del. John Olszewski Jr.](#), respective Senate and House delegation chairs, requested a "speedy reply" from the superintendent on concerns about the salary.

Legislators said that amid cutbacks within the school system and the transfer of some teachers to fill vacant

positions, Foose's salary seemed out of line.

"We are hoping to get an answer as to why that money is being expended in administration costs at a time when we are reducing our front-line teaching staff," Olszewski, who represents the 6th District, told the Towson Times last week during an interview.

An aide for Klausmeier, who represents the 8th District, said the Annapolis meeting is tentatively slated for Friday at 10 a.m. But that Hairston's office had not returned telephone calls to confirm.

School officials could not confirm the date, time or even if the meeting would occur. But, Herndon also said Hairston is expected to respond to legislators at the [Board of Education](#) session tonight — Tuesday, April 5, beginning at 5:15 p.m., at the board headquarters, 6901 Charles St., Towson. The meeting is expected to go into a closed session until approximately 7:00 p.m. Dr. Hairston is expected to speak sometime after 7, according to Herndon.

Hairston may have given a preview of his thoughts on the matter on March 30 when, during an appearance on WBAL Radio, he said BCPS has actually saved money by recently eliminating a top administrative deputy superintendent position.

Until recently BCPS had two and now only has one, he said.

However, we should note that the school system does have several assistant superintendent positions. (A couple of readers pointed that out last week after we ran our [comparison of local school systems' top administrators](#) — by the way, thanks for that feedback. We always welcome news tips and comments.)

Back to the WBAL Interview — during the interview with WBAL, Hairston also said he believes allegations from state legislators are personal.

"I think this is coming from a group of sand throwers — people that have something against me personally," he said during the WBAL interview with [Clarence Mitchell, IV, aka "C4."](#)

"I have always been available and accessible — my door is always open," Hairston said.

Hairston also responded on WBAL to our story that detailed the salaries of superintendents in the area, and which compared Hairston's annual salary of \$307,872 to the salary of the superintendent in Pinellas County, Fla. — who earns \$203,000 annually, according to officials there.

We had made that comparison because Baltimore County ranks as the 25th largest school system in the country, while Pinellas County, Fla., ranks as the 24th. And, as [Strange Bedfellows previously reported](#), Earnest [Hines the school board president](#) said salary is based upon school size.

Hairston said the Florida comparison was like "apples and oranges" because of perks and other contract provisions.

Meanwhile, whether Hairston discusses issues in Towson and/or Annapolis, parents say they are anxious to hear what he has to say.

"Baltimore County legislators, parents, teachers, students, and the community at-large, have many legitimate concerns," said Leslie Weber, president of the Loch Raven High School PTSA.

"I would hope that ... Superintendent Hairston would be more forthcoming regarding the major problems within BCPS, and would take them more seriously than he did in the interview on WBAL last week," said [Laurie Taylor-Mitchell, a Towson resident and BCPS parent](#).

Stay tuned.

Comment on this entry • No responses

School superintendent salaries unveiled

By Steve Schuster
Posted: March 27, 2011



Superintendents salary chart

Perhaps you've seen the headlines here on [ExploreBaltimore County](#) and elsewhere that new Baltimore County Public Schools Deputy Superintendent Renee Foose will earn an annual salary of \$214,000.

That salary information comes just as the school system is wrestling with [cuts and the potential for a teacher "excess" program that would trim positions and transfer some teachers to lower grade levels.](#)

The [Baltimore Sun said in a recent blog](#) that the BCPS system "doesn't pay its mid-level managers and teachers a lot compared to other districts, but they do spend a lot on upper level management."

How much is "a lot?" Perhaps, that term is subjective.

We performed a survey of Baltimore County Public Schools and the jurisdictions immediately surrounding it, asking for the annual salary of the superintendent, and that of the assistant superintendent (or in some cases, assistants — some jurisdictions have more than one).

We also asked for information about the number of schools in the system, and the 2010-2011 enrollment, to better give an sense of the size of the overall school system for comparison purposes. Here's what we found:

[Superintendent of Schools Salaries Chart](#)

Baltimore County Public Schools ... 172 schools; 104,331 students:

- Superintendent Joe Hairston, annual salary, \$307,872.
- Deputy Superintendent Renee Foose, \$214,000

Source = Office of Law, Baltimore County Public Schools

Baltimore City Public Schools ... 191 (plus an additional 10 programs); 83,800 students:

- Superintendent (Chief Executive Officer) Dr. Andres Alonso, \$260,000
- There is no Assistant Superintendent

Source = Eddie House, manager of public information, Baltimore City Public Schools

Carroll County Public Schools ... 43 schools; 27,334 students:

- Superintendent Stephen Guthrie, \$185,000
- Assistant Superintendent, Administration Jonathan O'Neil, \$139,335
- Assistant Superintendent, Instruction Steven Johnson, \$116,691

Source = Carey Gaddis, supervisor of community and media relations, Carroll County Public Schools

Howard County Public Schools ... 72 schools; 50,000 students:

- Superintendent Sydney Cousin, \$265,000
- Deputy Superintendent Mamie Perkins, \$194,765

Source = Patti Caplan, director of public relations, Howard County Public Schools

Anne Arundel County Public Schools ... 120 schools; 75,481 students:

- Superintendent Kevin Maxwell, \$257,000
- Deputy Superintendent Arlen Liverman, \$164,065

Source = Bob Mosier, public information officer, Anne Arundel County Public Schools

Harford County Public Schools ... 53 schools; 38,394 students:

- Superintendent Robert Tomback, \$190,000
- Associate Superintendent William Lawrence, \$150,000
- Assistant Superintendent, Operations Cornell Brown, \$131,594
- Assistant Superintendent, HR Jean Mantegna, \$131,594
- Assistant Superintendent, Business Services James Jewell, \$131,594

Source = Harford County Public Schools communications office

We should note that all of the jurisdictions in our survey responded to our public information requests for data within about 24 hours or less.

Meanwhile, who exactly sets the school superintendent's salaries in Baltimore County?

According to [State Delegate Johnny Ozsewski Jr.](#), chairman of the county's House Delegation in Annapolis, the [school board does](#).

[Earnest Hines, president of the Baltimore County Board of Education](#), said Hairston, who also serves as the school board's secretary and treasurer, "actually makes less on average" than other superintendents.

Hines said the salary rate paid to superintendents is based upon the size of the school system. Baltimore County ranks as the 25th largest system in the country.

"It's like a sports team; you don't want to pay more than the market value for an athlete," Hines said Thursday.

With that logic, then the superintendent for the 24th largest school system ([according to 2010 Census data](#)) would be earning slightly more, right?

However, the superintendent of Pinellas County, Fla. (which includes the gulf coast city of St. Petersburg), which is No. 24, [currently earns \\$203,000, according to the Pinellas County Public Schools Communications Office](#).

The salary issue in Baltimore County has sparked a call from some legislators in Annapolis for a meeting with [Hairston](#) to discuss the issue. Stay tuned on these pages, and in our print editions, for more on that this week ...

UPDATE: [State legislators seek dialogue with Baltimore County Superintendent Hairston](#)

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Redistricting committee sets schedule for trio of public hearings

By *Steve Schuster*
Posted: March 24, 2011

The newly-formed Baltimore County redistricting committee, which will recommend new district lines for the seven County Council districts based on the 2010 census, this week announced meeting times and locations for three public hearings.

The first hearing will be held on Tuesday, April 12, at 7

p.m. in Towson at the Historic Court House.

The second hearing will be held on Wednesday, April 13, at 7 p.m. in Owings Mills at New Town High School.

The third and final hearing will be held on Thursday, April 14, at 7 p.m. in Dundalk at Patapsco High School.

The provision for public hearings is required by law. The county charter requires the council to establish a five-member commission to make recommendations for redistricting every 10 years, based on census data.

Members of the committee, appointed by the County Council, are Ed Crizer Jr., James Gillis, Robert Latshaw Jr., Ralph Wright and Anne Neal.

Comment on this entry • No responses

March Madness hits elected officials

By *Steve Schuster*

Posted: March 17, 2011

Sure, elected officials have plenty on their plates these days, but that doesn't mean they can't make time for a little roundball every now and again.

As the NCAA Men's Division I Basketball Championship tournament gets under way — eventually leading to the "Final Four" — federal, state and local elected officials have their own rooting interests as they fill out their brackets to take part in March Madness.

At the Historic Court House in Towson, County Executive Kevin Kamenetz said his top four picks are Kansas, Duke, Pitt and Ohio.

Kamenetz said he expects Ohio to go "all the way".

"I hate to pick against President Obama who chose Kansas, but I believe it's Buckeyes all the way," Kamenetz said.

In the State House in Annapolis, [Sen. Jim Brochin](#), who represents Towson, said his top four picks are UNLV, Xavier, Wofford and Texas.

On Capitol Hill, in Washington D.C., [Congressman C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger](#), who represents portions of central Maryland, including parts of Baltimore County, said his top four picks are Ohio State, Kansas, Florida and Duke.

"As much as it pains me as a Terp, as a Terp season ticket holder, and a friend of (Maryland Coach) Gary Williams, I am going with Duke. I watched coach K (Krzyszewski). ... He's smart, and they have the experience and depth to take another national championship," Ruppersberger said Wednesday.

On the county level:

Seventh District Baltimore County Councilman and [Council Chairman John Olszewski](#), who represents Dundalk and Essex, said he envisions Pittsburgh, Kansas, Ohio State and Duke making it to the Final Four.

Olszewski - who is in his fourth term on the Council Council - perhaps factored in his own longevity when he noted that, "Ohio State has some really good senior leadership this year."

On the west side, 4th District Baltimore County [Council member Ken Oliver](#), who represents Woodlawn and Randallstown, predicts the following teams make it to the Final Four ... for the following reasons:

1) Texas — "Good guards." 2) Kansas — "Strong down bottom — the twin brothers (Marcus and Markieff Morris) are eventual lottery picks." 3) Duke — "Just because they're Duke." 4) Ohio State — "They have arguably the best big man in the country (Jared Sullinger)," Oliver said.

And, over to the northwest, 2nd District [Council member Vicki Almond](#), who represents Pikesville, said Duke is her No. 1 pick "because Maryland is not in it (any longer)."

She's also pulling for Kentucky and Kansas, and Gonzaga is her "wild card" choice.

Of course, the above picks are purely for entertainment purposes. And for those without any interest in basketball (we know you're out there somewhere), there's another March Madness on the way for you: Spring officially began last weekend.

[Comment on this entry](#) • [No responses](#)

Morhaim bill would exclude physician apologies from malpractice evidence

By [Steve Schuster](#)
Posted: [March 8, 2011](#)

State Delegate [Dan Morhaim](#), who represents Owings Mills in the 11th District, is the only medical doctor serving in the Maryland General Assembly.

He's [been in the headlines](#) recently for introducing legislation to legalize marijuana in Maryland for medicinal purposes.

But Morhaim has also introduced a bill that applies to medical malpractice lawsuits. The bill says, in effect, that if a doctor says he or she is "sorry" for a medical outcome, that apology would be inadmissible in a Maryland courtroom.

Morhaim told the Towson Times that the bill is needed in-part because, "a number of lawsuits come about because of communication problems."

Namely, when doctors' comments of regret can turn into a malpractice suit.

Under Maryland law, if a doctor makes a mistake and then apologizes, that apology — whether written or verbal — is admissible in court in a malpractice suit against the doctor.

[Michael Hayes, a law professor](#) at the University of Baltimore School of Law, said similar laws exist already in at least a dozen states, including New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

"I know from teaching torts that many courts around the country have adopted almost a rule of evidence that they don't admit a doctors apology," Hayes said. "They (courts) like the idea of doctors to be contrite, to help the patients and families."

Morhaim's colleagues from Baltimore County are among supporters of the bill.

[Del. Bill Frank](#), of the 42nd District, representing Towson, said the use of a simple apology as grounds for a lawsuit, "is highly problematic, since a humane, sincere expression of regret by the doctor for an unfavorable medical outcome does not suggest that the doctor is guilty of malpractice.

"This bill would disallow a verbal apology from being used in court to implicate the doctor in a malpractice lawsuit," Frank wrote in a press release last week supporting the Morhaim bill.

And [Del. Dana Stein](#), also from the 11th District, said, "Mistakes happens ... they are inevitable, as doctors are human. ... They (doctors) should speak frankly."

What do you think? Should a doctor's apology be admissible in court?

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Maryland's death penalty leaves questions unanswered

By [Steve Schuster](#)
Posted: [February 24, 2011](#)



Hospira's global headquarters in Lake Forest, Ill. - Photo by Steve Schuster

Earlier this month, the [Towson Times attended a press conference](#) in Annapolis where lawmakers announced they intended to once again introduce legislation designed to repeal the state's death penalty.

But at the press conference, opponents of the death penalty noted how one of the chemicals used in lethal injection, sodium thiopental, is no longer available in the United States, which has left Maryland, along with 34 other death penalty states, scrambling for alternatives.

"Maryland, as well as other states all over the country, are in a quandary (about) what to do," Baltimore County State's Attorney Scott Schellenberger told the Towson Times on Thursday.

Maryland's Public Safety Secretary Gary Maynard announced earlier this month that he intends to draft a new procedure for carrying out the death penalty, a process expected to take another six or more months, according to [a Baltimore Sun Blog](#).

But why is sodium thiopental, no longer available in the United States?

Officials for Chicago-based Hospira pharmaceuticals, which manufactured the drug, announced in January they would exit the market and no longer produce the product.

The reason?

Pressure from Italy, they say.

"Hospira had intended to produce Pentothal at its Italian plant. In the last month, we've had ongoing dialogue with the Italian authorities concerning the use of Pentothal in capital punishment procedures in the United States – a use Hospira has never condoned," according to [a press release issued in January on Hospira's website](#).

Dan Rosenberg, a spokesman for Hospira, told the Towson Times that the drug was never intended to end lives but was developed to save lives and to only be used as an anesthetic in hospitals.

But the drug has been used by dozens of states in carrying out executions.

The drug has other off-label uses too, including by the intelligence community as a ["truth serum."](#)

But as states are struggling to find an alternative, hospitals and patients are living without the drug.

Rosenberg acknowledged the inconvenience and said, "We regret leaving the market."

According to Rosenberg, and as The Washington Post has previously reported, the drug never began production at the newly proposed Italian plant and has last been made several years ago in a plant in North Carolina.

Questions remain about why another plant location wasn't chosen.

"Right now there are no viable production lines at our

plants," Rosenberg said.

Meanwhile, Rosenberg said Hospira has sent out letters to all 50 states (even though only 35 have the death penalty), condemning the use of the drug as a means of execution.

"We reached out to states to let them know we did not approve, and it was made for helping hospital patients," Rosenberg said Thursday.

According to Rosenberg, the anesthetic has been around for 70 years and was last produced in 2009.

Rosenberg said in the past two years the chemical was purchased by more than 3,400 hospitals in the United States.

Meanwhile, back in Maryland, Rick Binetti, communications director for Maryland's Department of Public Safety and Corrections, declined to comment on the state's off-label use of the drug.

According to Binetti, an execution has not occurred since 2006 because of a [moratorium](#) on the death penalty.

"Any supply of that drug we have has expired," Binetti said Thursday.

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Maryland marijuana bill would confront federal law, but who would enforce it?

By Steve Schuster
Posted: February 23, 2011

Maryland lawmakers in both the House of Delegates and Senate have introduced bills this legislative session that would legalize the use of marijuana in Maryland for medicinal purposes.

In a press release issued last month, [Del. Dan Morhaim](#), who represents Pikesville and Owings Mills, said the legislation would "allow, under narrow and well-defined circumstances, marijuana to be safely and responsibly obtained and used for bona-fide medical purposes only."

Both bills ([Senate Bill 308](#) and [House Bill 291](#)) will have hearings in the coming weeks in Annapolis.

Similar legislation allowing marijuana to be used for medical reasons currently exists in the District of Columbia and in at least 14 other states.

But, even if the bill passes and becomes law in Maryland, what happens when state law conflicts with current federal law — which still prohibits the drug's use?

Generally speaking, if a federal law and a state law conflict, the state law is invalid and the federal law is upheld, under the Supremacy clause of the federal constitution, explains law professor Richard Boldt, of the University of Maryland School of Law.

But under the administration of President Barack Obama, the federal law prohibiting the use of marijuana has not been enforced under certain circumstances, Boldt said.

"The Obama administration has made a policy decision to, in effect, stand down (enforcement) in certain circumstances," Professor Boldt said.

Does this give a free pass to violate federal law? Yes and no.

"Anybody (who uses marijuana, even for medicinal purposes) runs the risk of arrest and prosecution," Rusty Payne, a spokesman for the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, told the Towson Times on Monday.

But, Payne notes that his agency doesn't typically have the resources to go after individuals, and focuses more on larger scale criminal trafficking organizations.

While the DEA would not comment specially on a state legislative matter, in general terms, the DEA has cited risks and dangers associated with its use.

"Specifically, smoked marijuana has not withstood the rigors of science — it is not medicine, and it is not safe," according to a report issued by the U.S. Department of Justice, which outlines the DEA's position on marijuana.

[According to the report](#), on Oct. 19, 2009, U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder, who was appointed by Obama, announced formal guidelines for federal prosecutors in states that have enacted laws authorizing the use of marijuana for medical purposes.

"Federal resources should not be (used) on individuals whose actions are in compliance with existing state laws, and underscores that the Department will continue to prosecute people whose claims of compliance with state and local law conceal operations inconsistent with the terms, conditions, or purposes of the law," the report states.

So, what do state lawmakers representing Baltimore County think of the bills that would legalize the drug for medicinal purposes?

Check this week's story [HERE](#).

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Activists, home builders group find common ground on council bill?

By *Steve Schuster*
Posted: February 16, 2011

It doesn't often seem that civic activists and developers are on the same page, but it can happen.

That appeared to be the case Tuesday when the Baltimore County Council held a work session in Towson to discuss several items — among them a measure introduced by 5th District County Councilman David Marks, who represents Towson and Perry Hall, that would require community input meetings for developments to be “more convenient to the residents they will impact.”

Community input meetings are public meetings designed to solicit feedback for proposed development projects.

As the Towson Times previously reported, Mark's proposed legislation would give priority to have those meeting held within a certain mile radius of proposed developments.

Within the Urban-Rural Demarcation Line — the most urbanized part of Baltimore County — the meetings would have to be held within three miles of the development project.

Outside the Urban-Rural Demarcation Line, the distance would be eight miles.

Typically, community input meetings are held at schools and libraries. The legislation would also expand the list of locations to include houses of worship, community centers and other places of assembly.

At Tuesday's meeting, several people testified in support of the legislation, including Dennis Robinson Jr., president of the Perry Hall Improvement Association.

“We think this is a good common sense bill,” he said.

Apparently, the other side of the input meeting equation — developers — agree.

Or at least one.

Michael Harrison, representing Baltimore's chapter of the Home Builders Association of Maryland, expressed his interest in the legislation as well, and said, “We appreciate councilman Marks reaching out to us.”

Harrison's comments prompted County Council chairman John Olszewski, of the 7th District, to note, “It's always good when the community and developers are on the same page.”

Various other issues, including a resolution proposed by Marks and by 6th District Council member Cathy Bevins to adopt the Perry Hall Master plan, were also discussed at the meeting.

The plan will “layout blueprint for new development” in Perry Hall, Marks said at the meeting.

Those items will be voted on at the next council meeting on Feb. 22, at 7 p.m., at the Historic Courthouse in Towson.

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State of the State of Maryland, in the words of local legislators

By *Steve Schuster*
Posted: February 4, 2011

Gov. Martin O'Malley delivered his [annual State of the State address](#) yesterday before members of the Maryland General Assembly in Annapolis.

O'Malley said Maryland is facing tough choices ahead with a looming deficit, but he remained optimistic while highlighting some of the state's accomplishments.

Now that the governor has had his say, we asked local legislators for their opinion of Maryland's "State of the State."

Here are the responses we received ...

11th District (Owings Mills and Pikesville):

Sen. Bobby Zirkin (D) – "We are doing significantly better than most other states in the country ... but there are still a lot of people out of work, and the rebound across the country is not as fast as we would like to see. ... But things are looking better."

Del. Dan Morhaim (D) – "There are many tough decisions to be made, and it's important for all of us to be candid and honest about them. ... Do you raise taxes? Or, cut vital programs? (Both options are) not a good thing to do. I am on a third path — how do you make government operations more efficient?"

Del. Dana Stein (D) - "We are obviously in tough fiscal shape ... but we have the foundation for a solid recovery. We are already well positioned to come out of this difficult economic time."

42nd District (Towson and Lutherville-Timonium):

Del. Steve Lafferty (D) - "We have a lot of strengths, and we need to find some better ways to build upon them ... we have benefited greatly from our proximity to D.C. ..."

10th District (Woodlawn and Randallstown):

Del. Emmett Burns Jr. (D) – "We are in a state of hope. ... We are hoping that in the fiscal year 2012, we can balance the budget of \$1.4 billion without robbing the trust funds ... and see replacement of these monies through economic growth. The reality is we will have to cut more ... but cuts are always made on the backs of those who can't help themselves ... (cuts) that effect poor people ... like housing, education and health care."

7th District (Perry Hall and the east county):

Del. Pat McDonough (R) - "Maryland is in trouble." (Citing high unemployment, taxes and illegal immigration concerns).

Now it's your turn. What do YOU think is Maryland's "State of the State"? And what issues do you think are most pressing for the General Assembly? Respond below and let us — and them — know what you think.

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State of the Union: Ruppertsberger says defense cuts could still bring boon for Maryland

*By Steve Schuster
Posted: January 26, 2011*

It's that time of the year - snow has covered the ground, the Super Bowl is just a week away, and President Barack Obama delivered his [annual State of the Union address](#) Tuesday night from the U.S. Capitol.

The president addressed several key points that have been hot topics in Baltimore County — from immigration and health care to the economy. But one local congressman said after the speech that national defense issues still mean a boon for jobs in Maryland.

Former Baltimore County Executive and current [U.S. Rep. C.A. "Dutch" Ruppertsberger](#) - who represents Maryland's 2nd Congressional District including parts of Towson, Carney, Middle River and Essex - was among congressional

leaders in attendance in Washington for the president's address, and in an interview with the Towson Times afterward, said the federal deficit, "hurts our economy and makes us weaker as a nation. We are competing with Russia and China."

Ruppersberger remains optimistic, saying the president's speech "was positive" and had the right focus on bipartisanship and the budget. "He (President Obama) put it all out there," Ruppersberger said.

One of the things "out there" on Tuesday night was Obama's pledge to cut spending, including "tens of billions of dollars" in our nation's defense — which Obama said the secretary of defense, "and his generals, believe our military can do without."

Ruppersberger said a wide variety of cuts are fair game, but urged caution in that regard, saying, "we never want to be at a disadvantage, especially when it comes to national security."

Ruppersberger, who was recently [named ranking member of House Intelligence Committee](#), said, "I specialize in intelligence. There are lot of things I know that we are doing that we just can't afford anymore."

But, he added, the most important thing is "the security of our nation. "

"We want to make sure we protect ourselves. ... Prioritization is the key, as I think the president pointed out," he added.

Cuts aside, he said there may be a silver lining. Ruppersberger said job growth created to defend national security interests will still benefit Baltimore County in the form of job growth from the Department of Defense's Base Realignment and Closure process, also known as BRAC.

"Maryland is in good shape because of BRAC," he said. There are "more (Maryland) jobs - than anywhere else in the country. Aberdeen, Fort. Meade, Cyber Command ... all of these create high paying jobs.

"This means less taxes ... putting that money in schools and infrastructure."

"In 10 years, we will be larger than Silicon Valley," Ruppersberger predicted.

New jobs in Baltimore County would be welcome, said 5th District County Councilman David Marks, though he noted they will come with a local cost — namely keeping up with housing, transportation and other infrastructure needs to accommodate them.

"We should always welcome and do whatever we can to nurture new jobs," Marks said. "I view BRAC as a net positive for Baltimore County, although the growth will require some forward thinking so infrastructure is in place."

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Klausmeier named chairwoman of Baltimore County Senate Delegation

By Steve Schuster
Posted: January 14, 2011

Kathy Klausmeier, a state senator and Democrat serving the 8th District, was named chairwoman of the Baltimore County Senate delegation on Thursday.

"My goal is to have a very cohesive group of senators so that we all work together to help one another along," Klausmeier said. "We are a very diverse delegation, but I think it's very important that we work together to do the best job we can for the citizens of Baltimore county."

Klausmeier serves on several committees, including, Rules, Finance, Protocol, BRAC and Workers' Compensation Benefit and Insurance Oversight.

Jim Brochin, a state senator and Democrat serving the 42nd District, was named vice-chairman of the delegation after requesting a one-day delay for a vote, which failed, 4-4, according to Brochin.

"I asked for a one-day delay because I wanted the people running to present their case and present questions and answers," Brochin said.

Klausmeier said, "I look forward to working with him (Brochin) and all the other members."

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Olszewski named as chairman of Baltimore County House Delegation

By Steve Schuster
Posted: January 11, 2011

John Olszewski Jr., a state delegate and Democrat serving the 6th District - and son of Baltimore County Council Chairman John Olszewski Sr. - was named on Tuesday as the chairman of the Baltimore County House Delegation.

The younger Olszewski, of Dundalk, has been a member of the House of Delegates since 2006. He'll succeed past chairman Del. Eric Bromwell.

"I am honored to have the confidence of my colleagues in the Baltimore County House Delegation," Olszewski said in a statement.

"I will work hard for our members and all the residents of the county as an affirmation the support I have been shown," he added.

Olszewski currently serves on the House Ways and Means Committee and the Maryland P-20 Leadership Council (a panel that promotes education from preschool through graduate studies), and is also the co-chair of the Maryland Youth Advisory Council.

The delegation also named Delegate Steve Lafferty, of the 42nd District, as vice chairman, and Delegate Dana Stein, District 11 as secretary.

The announcements were made in anticipation of tomorrow's opening of the 2011 General Assembly session.

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New laws in the new year for Marylanders

By Steve Schuster
Posted: December 30, 2010

As [fireworks](#) illuminate the night sky above Baltimore's Inner Harbor, 2011 will roll in with some new laws on the books.

The new laws will take effect at 12:01 a.m. on Jan. 1.

Those motorists with a lead foot who receive a payable traffic citation [will have options](#): Pay the full fine within 30 days, request a waiver hearing (to plead guilty with an explanation), or request a trial. The new law only applies to certain traffic citations (DUI's will still require a court appearance).

Under the former law, motorists were automatically assigned a trial date, resulting in a significant number of "no shows," according to [a recent Washington Post article](#). Also according to the Post, Maryland State Police estimate that the new law could save the agency \$500,000/year.

Another new law pertains to automobile insurance policies issued or renewed on or after Jan. 1, 2011. The minimum for bodily injury coverage on liability insurance policies will increase to \$30,000. This is up nearly 1/3 from the current \$20,000 minimum, [according to the Maryland General Assembly website](#), which lists several of the new laws that will take effect on Jan. 1.

Also starting Jan 1, power suppliers selling electricity in Maryland will be required to buy more energy from solar sources.

[WBAL \(Baltimore's NBC affiliate\) reports](#) that supporters of the new law say it will "help create jobs in the solar power industry while boosting the state's use of renewable energy, but opponents contend the law will increase already high electric bills." Several additional new bills will be introduced at the beginning of the next legislative session in Annapolis in January.

One of those bills pertains to speed cameras.

Be sure to pick up a copy of the Towson Times next week for the full story.

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Baltimore County sees increasing levels of need among families

By Steve Schuster
Posted: December 20, 2010

Unemployment numbers are on the rise again nationally, according to government data released Friday.

Despite modest gains in the national unemployment rate (from 9.6 percent in September to 9.8 percent in November), Baltimore County has actually seen a modest decrease in unemployment — from 7.9 percent in September to 7.6 percent in October — according to Maryland's Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation (DLLR).

Overall, [according to the DLLR](#), Maryland saw a statewide increase in unemployment from 6.9 percent in October to 7.4 percent in November (But, I should note, some outlets, including [The Washington Post](#), reports that in the last year, Maryland's unemployment rate has remained steady at 7.4 percent.)

With these unemployment numbers — the county has seen a sharp increase in demand for social services. As the [Towson Times reported](#) in a video clip last week from County Executive Kevin Kamenetz's appointee interviews before the County Council, Baltimore County's Social Services Director Timothy Griffith said that the state was even sued last year for "its collective failure" to process assistance requests timely because of the sharp increase in demand.

As Griffith said during the interview — and as [The Baltimore Sun mentioned](#) in a recent editorial — the number of Baltimore County households receiving food assistance has almost quadrupled in the last decade, to more than 36,000.

As the jobless rate throughout Baltimore County and the nation remain high and county demand for social services, including food stamp assistance, has risen exponentially, prices are also on the rise.

(Take, for instance, the price motorists pay at the gas pump. According to the American Automobile Association, the cost for a gallon of regular 87 octane is up nationally from \$2.88 a gallon in November to \$2.98 in December. In Maryland, the average price for a gallon of regular is \$3.003, just a few cents higher than the national average, according to AAA. As of Saturday, in Baltimore County prices range from \$2.84 in White Marsh to \$3.12 on Falls Road and Northern Parkway for a gallon of regular gas, according to [Gasbuddy.com](#).)

With the news of high unemployment and a weak economy, the new county executive has submitted plans to the County Council to consolidate some elements of county government and eliminate positions through vacancy and attrition, which he says will save [\\$8 million](#). The County Council will vote on those matters Monday.

In addition, Kamenetz announced a [\\$2.4 million redevelopment plan in Pikesville](#) and a [new tourism initiative](#) to bring more revenue into the county and preserve/create jobs.

Will these initiatives actually have an impact on the county's expense and revenue equation, and will they create jobs? Time will tell, but what do you think?

What other initiatives or suggestions would you give the County Council and the county executive to move the

economy forward and keep more families from slipping into higher levels of need?

Let us know and we'll pass the ideas along.

NOTE: An earlier version of this blog had an incorrect number for the estimated amount of savings from consolidating some county offices and cutting positions. It has been corrected here.

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Movers and shakers in aisle 14

By Steve Schuster
Posted: December 19, 2010

The county Courthouse and the Council Chambers are where much of the business of Baltimore County is conducted, but I was reminded Saturday that, no matter who is in office, the real social and community network in the county starts at the same place: the supermarket.

On Saturday afternoon, as I was in the aisles at the Safeway store in Towson. (No endorsement intended, I recently moved to that general area and have been trying out a few different grocery stores.)

As I was putting an item into my cart, I thought I heard someone behind me say, "Hey." I turned around and, lo and behold, County Executive Kevin Kamenetz was standing beside me doing some shopping of his own.

We chatted a couple minutes — he asked where I was living and I asked him the same, mentioning that I thought he lived in Owings Mills. (Struck me as a bit odd to be shopping in Towson on a Saturday when Owings Mills probably has some very fine grocery stores of their own, but Kamenetz said he had just come from his law office in Towson.

Small world. I must admit I barely recognized him at first without the suit and tie, but there was something nice — almost small-townish — about being able to run into the county executive at the local store. (For the record, however, I did NOT notice what was in his cart.)

Next time you're at your local grocery store, you never know who you just might run into.

Guess maybe next time I go shopping in Towson, I ought to bring not only my list, but a reporter's notebook as well.

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Do we feel need for speed in council interviews of Kamenetz's draft picks?

By Steve Schuster
Posted: December 11, 2010

On Tuesday, the new Baltimore County Council will begin interviewing new County Executive Kevin Kamenetz's top draft picks for his new cabinet.

At [the last council meeting](#) on Dec. 6, the council received letters from Kamenetz containing a listing of appointments for his new dream team.

Included were several familiar faces, such as former Councilman Vincent Gardina, who was tapped by Kamenetz to head the Department of Environmental Protection and Sustainability, and Fred Homan as the County's Administrative Officer.

Additionally, as reported by the Towson Times this week, former 1st District councilman [Sam Moxley will be tapped for a new role](#) in the county's law office.

And another potential appointment — Arnold Jablon to serve as the new chief of the Department of Permits, Inspections and Approvals — has [drawn a mix of concern and praise](#).

Department heads being asked to return include Police Chief James Johnson and Health Department Director Dr. Gregory Branch.

Full details regarding salary and pension have not been released.

In the meantime, some believe the executive office is attempting to move fast to take advantage of a new council. The council is the first in many years to not have a single member with a legal background. The last council had three members — Kamenetz, Moxley and T. Bryan McIntire.

The executive office says a fast track is not the goal.

"It's really just a matter of getting down to business and keeping county agencies moving forward," said Ellen Kobler, a spokeswoman for the executive.

Former 3rd District Councilman McIntire (R) said that when the situation was reversed, then-council chairman Kamenetz held up three appointments for then-new County Executive Jim Smith, which created some initial tension between the executive and the council eight years ago.

"There were three occasions when Kamenetz held up three (of the county executive) appointments. They never ended up being appointed," McIntire said.

Still, McIntire, a Republican, said he believes Kamenetz (D) is doing the right thing by "hitting the ground running," and getting appointments through quickly.

"I think that it's good to get your team in place and share with them the values you expect them to advocate and live up to, and get the county going again," McIntire said.

"It's a double-edged sword. It's a time to get them (the appointments) through, your team has to be in place, but at the same time, it's also equally important to get it done right with quality. ... From what I've heard, (Kamenetz) has made some good choices so far," McIntire said.

But, what does the new County Council have to say?

Fifth District Councilman David Marks (R) said that despite a fast pace of appointments, he believes the council will have adequate time to conduct interviews and perform due diligence.

"I've been involved with federal and state confirmation hearings, and the pace is certainly faster than I'm used to," Marks said.

"Also, it's customary at the federal and state levels for appointees to meet with those confirming them. That generally hasn't happened yet. Having said that, I've received assurances from the Council Chairman (John Olszewski) that we'll have the time we need to question the nominees, particularly more senior appointees such as the county administrative officer," he said.

"We won't be limited to 15 minutes. The county executive (Kamenetz) was a very thoughtful member of this council for 16 years. That's the tradition we'll continue," Marks said.

Third District Councilman Todd Huff (R), who is now sits in McIntire's former chair, said he will not pass judgment until after the interviews on Tuesday.

"In all fairness, until I can talk to the (nominees), I can't pass judgment on them or on Kevin," Huff said.

"When you have a change in the guard, (the executive office) tends to reassign some people and make some changes, and some of these changes in my opinion are positive. He (Kamenetz) is looking out for our future," he said.

"Kevin's heart is in the right place. He is trying to do whatever it takes to keep Baltimore County in a good fiscal state," Huff said.

The interviews will begin at 10 a.m. on Tuesday at the Old Court House at 400 Washington Avenue in Towson, and are open to the public. The council work session will begin at 2 p.m., and interviews are expected to continue after the work session.

Don Mohler, Kamenetz's chief of staff, notes that it's up to the council to decide when to vote on the appointments.

Those votes can take place at the council's leisure, according to McIntire, who said it's really up to council Chairman Olszewski (D) to determine if more time is needed before holding a vote. Olszewski could not be reached on Friday for his thoughts on the timetable.

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Jim Smith defends son's activism, fundraising for County Council candidates

By Steve Schuster
Posted: December 7, 2010

Outgoing Baltimore County Executive Jim Smith is defending his son's role in raising money for County Council candidates in the 2010 primary and general elections — two of whom won seats in November.

In an interview with the Towson Times for a story in this week's print edition — [discussing his eight years in office as executive](#) — Smith defended his son's activism for candidates' campaigns.

"Let's face it," he said, "there were five new council seats (and) these people were generally unknown. ... Getting them known was critical to the opportunity for the community ... to see who they were."

Smith's son, Michael Paul Smith, and fellow attorney David Gildea hosted fundraisers for then-candidates Tom Quirk (1st District), Cathy Bevins (6th District) and Gordon Harden (5th District), all Democrats.

With support from the Smith/Gildea team — and also with the backing from the county executive himself in the form of radio commercials before the election — Quirk and Bevins won seats on the council. Harden lost in the primary.

Michael Paul Smith recently accepted an offer to join the law offices of Gildea and Schmidt as a partner, adding his name to the firm — which specializes in land-use cases.

Donna Spicer, a Loch Raven activist, has been among those critical of the Smith/Gildea fundraisers, saying, "It certainly would appear that they have raised funds to ensure that they would have a friendlier relationship with the council people that they helped (to elect)."

But Matthew Crenson, a professor emeritus of political science at Johns Hopkins University, said there's nothing illegal about such work for campaigns.

Asked specifically for his opinion of the Smith/Gildea situation, Crenson said, "What they are doing may not be proper, but I have no reason to believe it's illegal."

For his part, Michael Paul Smith told us last month, "I am politically involved because it was what I was taught to do, and what I believe is important. I would encourage all (people) to be politically involved."

His father agreed. The county executive rejected the notion that the fundraisers would present a conflict if and when the new council members vote on land-use matters represented by Smith/Gildea.

"I mean, you could ask me the same question about a community activist who worked very hard for a candidate. Are they going to have undue influence because they worked really hard?" Smith said.

"Does that mean every environmental group that picks somebody to support is going to take over their decision-making?" he said.

"I don't think so.

"Money is not the only thing you need to win campaigns," Smith said. "You need activists on your staff. You need community groups."

The full story, in which Smith discusses budget challenges, his Renaissance program and troubles with Mother Nature during his two terms, appears in Wednesday's edition of the Towson Times, Catonsville Times and Arbutus Times, and can also be accessed [HERE](#).

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Brochin, Smith and Marks brave cold and kick off Winterfest activities

By Steve Schuster
Posted: December 6, 2010



Winterfest

Pictured above, Republican 5th District Councilman-elect David Marks, State Senator Jim Brochin (D), and County Executive Jim Smith (D) turned out on Saturday night at Olympian Park in Towson for what was one of Smith's last public appearances as Baltimore County executive.

The above, along with others including Towson Chamber of Commerce President Nancy Hafford, braved the cold Saturday night in the interest of stimulating the local economy and kicking off [Winterfest](#), which included a Christmas tree lighting and activities for children.

More coverage of Winterfest, and a profile of Smith as he exits the executive's office, will be in this week's edition of the Towson Times. There will also be coverage of the Monday swearing-in ceremony for the new county executive and council online and in The Times.

New elected officials will be sworn in Monday morning at 10 a.m. at Towson Center Arena at Towson University. For those planning to attend, free satellite parking will be available at the following two locations with continuous shuttle bus service to and from the Towson Center Arena:

- Ware Avenue Parking Garage, 108 Ware Avenue, corner of York Road and Washington Avenue
- County Office Building, 111 W. Chesapeake Avenue

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Wargotz out of running for state GOP chair, but who's in?

By Steve Schuster
Posted: December 3, 2010

Dr. Eric Wargotz - the Republican who lost in his bid to unseat longtime U.S. Senator Barbara Mikulski - has reportedly declined overtures to try to become the next Maryland Republican Committee chairman, according to the blog, [Montgomery County Daily](#).

"In conjunction with family, friends, supporters and trusted advisers I have reached the conclusion that although I am up for the challenge of leading this effort as Chairman, I will forgo this unique opportunity at this time as I continue to strongly consider a run for elected office in the near future," Wargotz said in the Daily's blog post.

Wargotz is a resident of Queen Anne's County, and is a physician and businessman.

"I am disappointed Eric has withdrawn, because I know Eric would have put his full energy into building the Maryland Republican Party," Daniel Vovak, a member of Montgomery County's Republican Central Committee, told the Towson Times on Friday.

But if Wargotz is out, who is in?

Local state Del. Pat McDonough, a Republican representing the 7th District, might find out on Saturday. McDonough, who has a radio show on WCBM, 680 AM, will host a candidate forum on Saturday evening, from 8-to-10, with candidates for the Maryland Republican Party chairmanship.

McDonough said he's not sure who will be there. "Who ever comes will come," he said.

But McDonough is confident several potential candidates will appear, including Mike Estève, a 20-year-old Loyola College student who is the current Maryland Federation of College Republican chair; and Sam Hale, 25, founder of the conservative group, Maryland Society of Patriots.

State Sen. Alex Mooney, who represented Frederick and Washington counties until his narrow election loss, and Mary Kane, former Gov. Robert Ehrlich's running mate this year in his re-election bid, are also interested, McDonough said.

Appearing on the show is is "a rare opportunity," McDonough said. "The people who will actually cast the vote and make the decision to be exposed to a two-hour conversation."

McDonough said he attended a going-away roast last night for current chair Audrey Scott, of Prince George's County, at the BWI Marriott with 500-plus members of the Republican Party.

In regard to the upcoming race, "this will be a very important four-year term for the new chair," he said.

McDonough said he is going to ask candidates to make a pledge not to run for another office during the four-year term, to prevent conflicts.

"This position is insider baseball for politics, it's not like the County Council. This is about 280 committee members from all across the state. You have to convince enough of them to support you. The show [Saturday] is important because a lot of them will be listening and hearing them [the candidates] for the first time."

McDonough noted that he has not endorsed any candidate at this time.

"I don't have a horse in this race," he said. "Personally, I like Eric as an individual, but you have to understand this is a toughest job that pays no salary and demands a lot of time and a lot of work. I think it's the toughest job for the Republican party in the state of Maryland."

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Rift in Baltimore County GOP continues to spark controversy

By Steve Schuster
Posted: December 3, 2010

Baltimore County Republican Central Committee Chairman Tony Campbell has been in the headlines quite a bit recently, and continues to work through a rocky start to his term in office.

This week, his chairmanship — and some of the behind-the-scenes wrangling of he committee — were the subject of a meeting that started in the open, but ended behind closed doors.

As you may recall, Campbell was upset last month about an e-mail he sent to fellow committee members — which was leaked to the press — discussing the possibility that the committee might support a Democrat, 4th District representative Ken Oliver, as the next chairman of the County Council. If selected, Oliver would be the first African American chosen as council chair.

Members of the committee did not embrace the idea — Campbell himself acknowledges it was quickly shot down — but he felt the leaking of the e-mail to the media was part of a “smear campaign” attempting to undermine his chairmanship. The issue reached an even higher level when Campbell challenged his colleagues to try and impeach him at the Nov. 29 meeting.

That didn't happen, though the Nov. 29 did apparently get a bit testy. According to Campbell, the first hour of Monday's meeting was “business as usual.” But, about an hour into the meeting, members decided they wanted to air their grievances — prompting a motion from the floor for an executive session.

The motion was seconded, and the group adjourned to a closed-door meeting.

“The door was closed but you could hear what's going on,” said Campbell.

Campbell declined to discuss the particulars of that closed session, but said he was not surprised about its substantive issues.

“It was what I expected for the past six months — the committee is fractured,” he said.

But despite that assessment, Campbell said he believes the situation — and his chairmanship — will eventually work out.

“We needed an airing of everyone's views and I think that was accomplished. One of the things that's important, is to know everyone's stance,” Campbell said. “I think it was a good first step, but it's a first step.

“We are going to move forward but it's going to take time heal those wounds. But I'm confident it will work out,” he said.

[Comment on this entry](#) • [No responses](#)

3rd District Councilman-elect Huff picks mix of experience for staff

By *Steve Schuster*
Posted: November 30, 2010



[huff.jpg](#)

Republican and 3rd District County Council member-elect Todd Huff, who will take office on Dec. 6 to represent the northern part of Baltimore County, has named his chief aide and two legislative aides for his staff.

His chief aide will be Marcie Goodman, currently an aide to 3rd District Councilman T. Bryan McIntire — who Huff is replacing.

“Marcie is a Godsend,” said Huff. “She knows all of the county programs and just how to get the job done right. She will be really constituent service minded.”

After serving with McIntire, Goodman says she is well prepared for the transition.

“We (current legislative assistants) bring a lot of institutional knowledge, relationships, and institutional memory, and that serves the constituents and the council member's very well,” Goodman said.

CR Hogendort, who will be a Towson University alumnus in less than two weeks will serve as Huff's part-time legislative assistant.

Hogendort started out as a campaign intern for Huff, but was later promoted to campaign manager.

"He has done an exceptional job and is very well liked by constituents. He knows what I would like to get accomplished in the 3rd District," Huff said.

Huff also named Robin Troy to be a full time legislative assistant. Troy is a small business owner, a campaign volunteer, and has a background in the medical field, Huff said.

"She is a hard worker and is very good at keeping CR and myself organized," he said.

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Campbell's talk of impeachment in Republican committee adds fuel to fire

By Steve Schuster
Posted: November 23, 2010

Baltimore County Republican Central Committee Chairman Tony Campbell, as you may recall, was the subject of controversy last week over an e-mail he sent to fellow committee members that was leaked to the press.

Well, this week, when Campbell sent an internal e-mail to committee members, he intentionally copied the message to the Towson Times and others.

At the end of the e-mail he said to members, "P.S. Don't bothers leaking this e-mail to the press — I have saved you the energy and sent it myself."

The e-mail told members of the committee's next meetings, but also discussed what Campbell said are movements against him within the committee — or as he put it, "there is a group of members in the committee who do not want me as chairman."

"Let's save ourselves a lot of wasted time and energy fighting over scraps of power and bring your charges now!" wrote Campbell. He then cited Maryland statutes on the process for a potential impeachment.

Basically Campbell, who has been in office less than two weeks, is challenging his colleagues to try and impeach him at the next meetings, scheduled for Monday, Nov. 29 and Monday, Dec. 6.

In the e-mail that started the whole flap last week, Campbell had proposed that the Republican Party support 4th District Councilman Ken Oliver — a Democrat — to become the first African-American chair of the County Council.

The suggestion to back a Democrat as council president was controversial with the Republican committee — even Campbell noted that it was shot down in subsequent e-mail conversations with executive committee members.

But was it impeachable? Campbell said the leak of the e-mail was a "smear campaign," but others on the GOP committee say no one is really talking about impeachment — except Campbell himself.

The Sun's Raven Hill [has blogged about the subject](#), quoting central committee members on the subject.

According to the Sun, "Al Mendelsohn, the party's first vice-chairman, said he hasn't heard anyone discuss impeaching Campbell."

And committee member at large Chris Defeo suggested, according to the Sun, that, "I would like to see us get past this, but I don't know if that's going to happen," Defeo said. "He seems to be dividing the party rather than bringing the party together."

For his part, Campbell voiced an air of defiance in his latest e-mail about any potential effort to oust him.

"I was elected chairman by the Republican voters of Baltimore County for the purpose of helping our Republican candidates to win elective office," he wrote. "Under Maryland Law, impeachment and trial are the only way that you can remove me from office. I will continue to serve as chairman, with the powers and duties of that office, until the General Assembly of the State of Maryland decides otherwise."

Comment on this entry • No responses

Leaked e-mail subject of controversy within Republican Party

*By Steve Schuster
Posted: November 18, 2010*

Baltimore County has a unique political dynamic, in the sense that Republicans must elect a chairperson for their central committee, according to 5th District Councilman-elect David Marks.

Antonio Campbell happens to be the elected Chairman of the Baltimore County Republican Central Committee.

On Wednesday, Campbell sent an internal e-mail to other committee members, and somehow the e-mail leaked out and appeared in "Cross Purpose," a blog by Richard J. Cross.

The e-mail, in part, said: "An opportunity to change the political game and our future fortunes in Baltimore County has presented itself to me. As you know, five members of the County Council are new to the office including two of our own, David Marks and Todd Huff. Johnny O (John Olszewski Sr.) has been chair of the body and expects to be re-elected to the position.

"I think it would be a good move politically for the Republican Party to support Ken Oliver to become the first African-American chair of the County Council. Historically, Democrats have taken the black vote for granted while not allowing them to hold high office ..."

According to Campbell, who is African-American, the e-mail was leaked by members of the "executive committee who don't want me as chairman," he said.

Although Campbell chalks this up to a "Smear Campaign to him," Marks is upset not only with the content of the message but also that the e-mail reached the general public before County Council members.

"We didn't know about this at all," Marks said.

Marks said he plans to talk with his fellow County Council members but suspects that Olszewski, the current council chair, will be selected for the position, again.

"I think Tony (Antonio Campbell) may have some good ideas ... but things like this, he should really run by us first," Marks said.

The irony, according to Campbell, is that there was a follow up e-mail later that day from executive committee members that said they didn't like the idea of Oliver being the next council chair and Campbell said the issue would have been dead had the e-mail not leaked.

"You expect people to act like adults ... If you are elected as officers, you should act like officers," Campbell said.

Apparently, Marks is not the only one perturbed that someone leaked the e-mail to the press. Robert Thibodeau, a central committee member, called for action in another e-mail sent out yesterday to Campbell — and copied to select members of the news media, including the Towson Times.

"On the topic of leaks, back stabbing and the undermining of authority, I take a totally uncompromising position," Thibodeau wrote. "If it can be determined who the leak is, they should be removed from their position on the executive board for an ethics violation. Conduct such as this is not acceptable and I will not condone it. ... "

Marks said it is a challenge for the Republican Party to earn African-Americans votes, because African-Americans historically vote for Democrats.

"It's going to take a lot of effort and a lot of years," Marks said, referring to Republicans earning more African-American votes in Baltimore County.

Marks and Ken Holt, the Republican who ran strongly for Baltimore County Executive, believe Holt would have won had more African-American voters supported the Republican Party.

"I lost only by a very narrow margin on the West Side [of Baltimore County] ... near Randallstown," Holt said in a post-election interview. Holt added that this area was mostly comprised of African-American voters.

In the meantime, Marks thinks the issue with Campbell is an unnecessary distraction. "Both of us (Marks and Todd Huff) have spent a lot of time on this when we are busy meeting new people and developing new relationships."

This blog has been updated.

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Gardina says he's looking for work; Marks will be looking for questions

By Steve Schuster
Posted: November 14, 2010

As current elected officials are wrapping up their terms, newly elected officials are preparing for office — and their arrival will mean sweeping changes for Baltimore County.

That's especially true in the 5th County Council District, which covers the Towson area to Perry Hall, and where Republican David Marks will replace five-term Councilman Vince Gardina, a Democrat, who opted to retire at the end of this term.

As the new wave comes in, what will happen to the officials leaving office? There's no shortage of rumors, gossip and speculation about people who might or might not be offered posts in the administration of county executive-elect Kevin Kamenetz. For now, though, remember — it's all speculation.

One of the subjects of speculation is Gardina. Rumors have been circulating that because Gardina donated money from his own campaign war chest to the Kamenetz campaign, he may be up for a post in the new administration.

But Charles Klein, treasurer of the Kamenetz campaign, noted that Gardina did not personally provide any contributions to Kamenetz. Gardina's campaign war chest — which Gardina didn't use because he decided not to run — did make a donation, and Gardina's account participated in a "slate" that was created to jointly support the campaign of Kamenetz, and council chairman John Olszewski Sr., according to Gardina.

This week I've had the opportunity to sit down with councilman Gardina — as well as councilman-elect Marks, and Mike Ertel (who ran against Marks, but lost by a fairly narrow margin) — for a story that will appear in next week's Towson Times.

Gardina told me that — rumors and speculation aside — he has nothing set up in Kamenetz's administration. In fact, he said he's looking for a job.

"I guess I will be looking for work ... at this point, Kamenetz has not offered me any jobs nor discussed any job [prospects] with me," Gardina said.

Gardina said it is reasonably foreseeable that when Kamenetz returns from his vacation he will likely wrap up filling positions in the central office before trying to fill secondary positions.

That's not to say Gardina won't get a job under Kamenetz, but is it a sure thing? In fairness to Kamenetz and every other newly elected official, a lot of people donated a lot of money to a many different candidates. (For example, 3rd District Councilman T. Bryan McIntire gave county executive candidate Ken Holt's campaign \$106,000 from his war chest. Does that mean McIntire would be owed a job had Holt won?)

By the way, how much a candidate received in campaign donations — and from who — is not classified information.

Under Maryland law, reports of all campaign donations are submitted to the Maryland Elections Board and are available to the public. To see who gave what to whom (in the most recent wave of donations) — visit <http://www.mdelections.org/campaign-finance/advanced-search/contributions>.

Ultimately, Gardina's future plans, Ertel's comments about Mark's qualifications and Mark's agenda are all likely to surprise some. Stay tuned.

In the meantime, mark your calendars and have your questions ready, because 5th District councilman-elect David Marks will be available in a live chat on our website, www.explorebaltimorecounty.com, on Thursday from 11:30 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. to answer any questions that you might have. If you want, you can e-mail questions in advance to explorebaltimorecounty@patuxent.com.

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Where in the world is Kevin Kamenetz?

*By Steve Schuster
Posted: November 12, 2010*

After a grueling campaign, a late election night and work to set up his transition team, Baltimore County executive-elect Kevin Kamentz and his wife, Jill, are on vacation this week at an undisclosed location, according to his 2nd District County Council office and various government officials.

Both his council and campaign offices declined to comment where the family is enjoying time off. However, Larry Kaminitz (yes, a slightly different spelling) a CPA and supporter who helped the campaign, said Kamenetz is, "taking a well deserved rest after a very long campaign." Indeed it was. In a note to supporters on his campaign web site, Kamenetz notes that the election, "has taken us through 610 square miles of our County, 173 miles of waterfront, thousands of acres of scenic rural beauty, and hundreds of quality neighborhoods that we call home."

Before heading out, the executive-elect set the wheels in motion for his transition, naming former county executive Ted Venetoulis as adviser on his transition team and also tasking County Administration Officer Fred Homan to complete an analysis of county department's with an eye toward efficiencies.

Venetoulis suggested it was a good time for Kamenetz to take a break. Through Don Mohler, spokesperson for Baltimore County Executive Smith, Venetoulis issued a statement that, "Kevin is taking some time off to be with his wife and his family. There is not a whole lot of news right now [regarding the transition]."

With regard to revealing names of people who will fill positions in the Kamenetz administration, Mohler said Venetoulis is, "reviewing the [county] government organization and will report his findings to Kevin ... at the appropriate time, Kevin will review the next steps for his transition."

Even Kamenetz's opponent in the county executive race, Republican Ken Holt, said this week that a post-election vacation made sense. "He's got to recharge his batteries, just like everyone else," Holt said.

Whether Kamenetz and his wife are in a tropical paradise or the mountains of West Virginia, we may never know. However, his office says he's expected to return tomorrow, Saturday, Nov. 13, which will leave him three weeks to prepare for his transition into the county executive's office.

He'll be sworn in Dec. 6.

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Towson University finishes first in cyber security competition

By Steve Schuster
Posted: November 9, 2010

Towson University took first place over four other schools from the Baltimore-Washington D.C. area in a cyber security contest hosted last Thursday by Falls Church-based Computer Sciences Corporation, a government contractor and consulting/outsourcing company.

The collegiate competition, held as part of an annual open house in Chantilly, challenged various schools' ability to protect their [computer networks against hackers](#).

"This [event] was co-branded with the CyberWatch operating center (a consortium of 50 colleges/universities, including Towson), as a way to encourage schools and students to participate," said Ron Knode a director at CSC and an adjunct faculty member at Towson University.

"Towson is very experienced, very good, [and] much practiced ... they are certainly a favorite for the eastern [regional] competition at Johns Hopkins Columbia Center next March."

Members of the first-place Towson University team included Brian Arloff, Christopher Caleone, Brian Haar, Cheng Lu, Victor Mawia, Robert Murphy, Steven Ouellette, and Yinchuan Song. Knode is a member of CyberWatch operating center's advisory board along with several members of the intelligence community, including the National Security Agency, and several other well known government contractors, such as Lockheed Martin and Northrop Grumman.

"We do several billions of dollars of work for the federal government, and we encourage universities across the country to support curricula which produces better people ... the next generation of the cyber work force," Knode said.

The Community College of Baltimore County took second at the competition, the University of Maryland, third and James Madison University in Virginia, fourth.

The day-long competition lasted nearly eight hours as the four teams attempted to defend their respective networks.

"The students have been working really hard all year," said Mike O'Leary, the director of TU's center for applied information technology who has coached the team for six years. "I have had a group of students that have been working since the beginning of the summer in preparation for these types of competitions."

Towson also won the regional competition last year to make it to the national finals in San Antonio, where it finished fourth.

"Most of those students [from last year's team] have since graduated, and we are starting over mostly with a new group of students," O'Leary said.

The demand for cyber security professionals has been growing in recent years, and is expected to continue, according to Caitlin Martin, with the Ogilvy Public Relations firm who represents Computer Sciences Corp.

According to a Department of Homeland Security official, "DHS is focused on building a world-class cyber security team by hiring a diverse group of cyber security professionals - computer engineers, scientists, and analysts - to secure the nation's digital assets and protect against cyber threats to our critical infrastructure and key resources. The DHS National Cyber Security Division (NCSA) is ... nearly tripling its cyber security workforce ... by more than 70 percent in FY 2010."

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The morning after for county election officials ... and Kamenetz

By Steve Schuster
Posted: November 3, 2010

What a night for candidates, voters, members of the news media, and election officials.

Overall, voting in Baltimore County went very smoothly, with only "a few bumps in the road," according to Katie Brown, director of the Baltimore County Board of Elections.

Brown said they experienced a handful of "calibration issues," in which machines would freeze upon printing out voter registration information.

But, once the computers were re-started, problems dissipated, resulting in no significant issues, she said.

The problems were reported in the Parkville area at Pine Grove Elementary School, Timonium Elementary, Sandalwood Elementary in the Essex area, and possibly in other jurisdictions.

Looking back and moving forward ...

For the winner of the Baltimore County executive race, Democrat Kevin Kamenetz says the past 18 months have proved to be a rewarding educational opportunity.

"Campaigning is a great experience, because it forces you to get out and meet voters and go to areas you don't normally go to and listen and learn, and that's what I've done over the past 18 months," Kamenetz said at an interview after his victory speech at the Pikesville Hilton on Tuesday night.

So, now what? Kamenetz said he will announce plans in the next couple of days with regard to moving forward to more efficiently run county government.

"I know I will be meeting with people within the administration, [including] the police chief and fire chief," he said.

Kamenetz said although 28 days is a short amount of time from election night to inaugural, "Fortunately, I have a great relationship with County Executive (Jim) Smith and I know we are going to work well together over the next 28 days to ensure a very seamless transition. Again, given my experience in the council, this really allows me to hit the ground running.

"I don't think we are going to miss a beat."

The change for county executive is just one of many in county government based on yesterday's elections. The county will soon have five new council members, including two Republicans, and the first woman to serve in more than a dozen years. See our stories today for details, and be sure to check back with explorebaltimorecounty.com for updates regarding the new Baltimore County government transition and other breaking news.

WHAT DO YOU THINK? Did things go smoothly for you at the polls yesterday? What was the biggest surprise for you in the election results?

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Bailey offers to withdraw from State's Attorney race ... with a catch

By Steve Schuster
Posted: October 30, 2010



[bailey-shellenberger.jpg](#)

With all eyes on the gubernatorial race, county executive and county council races, there's been less media attention focused on the Baltimore County State's Attorney's race between incumbent Democrat Scott D. Shellenberger and his challenger, Republican Steve Bailey.

But Bailey himself focused attention on the race this week — when he offered to withdraw his candidacy with less than a week to go before the election.

In a press release issued Thursday, Oct. 28, Bailey said he'd step aside — but with a catch: He'd withdraw if Shellenberger would agree to take a voluntary pay cut and change to a 401K plan from his current pension.

Bailey has essentially acknowledged that Shellenberger has done a capable job as county state's attorney, and in his press release even went as far as to encourage people to vote for him if he agrees to the pay cut and pension concession. However, he has been critical of the position's salary — more than \$214,000 — and pension provisions. Bailey has made the fiscal aspects of the job a large part of his campaign.

This week, he said his challenge to Shellenberger essentially brings that to a head.

"My press release was basically a challenge to the State's Attorney to prove that public service is not all about money," he said.

"Right now, he is the second highest paid official in the state. ... I have yet to hear an explanation why I he should make more than the governor.

"I think this is at the heart of our difference, as to what public service is all about, I believe that public service, being an elected official, should involve a measure of sacrifice," Bailey said.

Bailey said that, for the time being, he's still in the running — stating that Shellenberger has not agreed to the pay cut and pension offer based upon his understanding of the comments in the Baltimore Sun and said that Shellenberger had not responded to his inquiries.

In an Oct. 6 story for the Towson Times, Shellenberger noted that his office was \$200,000 under budget last year and projected to be nearly \$500,000 under budget this year, some of which comes from an unofficial hiring freeze.

"I think I've been a very good steward of the public's money," he said in that Times article.

In 2008, Shellenberger did ask legislators to reduce the salary for the office beginning in 2010, the soonest a change could take effect. As a result, the salary for the next state's attorney will be reduced to \$194,000 — a level that Bailey says is still out of line.

We haven't heard a response from Shellenberger on Bailey's offer to withdraw — as of Friday evening, he had not responded to this reporter's inquiry on the issue.

If he does, we'll report it — so be sure to check back. If Bailey follows through, we might just have the first election result of the 2010 season.

E-mail me at sschuster@patuxent.com

Follow me on Twitter at www.twitter.com/stevenschuster

WHAT DO YOU THINK? Is the issue of salary and pension enough to sway your opinion of the State's Attorney race? And should Bailey withdraw if Shellenberger agrees with this proposal?

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Here's hoping for a productive, and interactive, relationship

By Steve Schuster
Posted: October 28, 2010

I'm Steve Schuster, and I'm excited to be the new government and politics reporter for Baltimore County, working here on ExploreBaltimoreCounty.com and on the print side of our newspapers.

With the 2010 election just days away, this is a defining time for Baltimore County. Your votes next Tuesday will have a profound and lasting impact on jobs, education, crime, traffic, taxes, and environmental sustainability; all issues that affect each and every one of us. It's a daunting time to be starting, but it's also an opportune time, as I get to know the new faces in government.

I started my journalism career nearly a decade ago as sole editor and reporter for a small town newspaper, about 20 minutes away from Lambeau Field, just outside of Green Bay, Wis. (That's a long way from the purple and black of Ravens territory, where I'm now proud to reside.)

Throughout my career, I've always been grateful for, and humbled by, the hard-working individuals I've met as a reporter. From farmers to factory workers; members of the armed forces, law enforcement and the intelligence community to school teachers and health care providers, each has educated us and helped to keep me informed of issues that really matter.

A newspaper — and website — is only as good as its sources, and those sources are you.

That's why I hope you'll keep in touch, both in terms of stopping here for the latest news, and by letting me know what you might like me to write more about.

Please send me story comments, ideas, leads and tips. I appreciate them all — and together, I hope we can serve the community, and pass along information to keep county residents well-informed.

I was happy to meet several people last night at the county executive forum between Republican Ken Holt and Democrat Kevin Kamenetz at Stevenson University. (See our story on the home page of explorebaltimorecounty.com.)

I'll be all around the county and in the halls of county government in Towson, so if you see me please stop by and introduce yourself.

And thanks,

Steve Schuster

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