



The LEGISLATIVE WRAP-UP

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Opening Day

The 413th session of the General Assembly of Maryland convened at noon on Wednesday, January 13, marking the official beginning of the 1999 session, the first one of the four-year term.

Opening day was filled with ceremony and symbolism as each chamber commenced with the organization of its body. The 37 new members heard their names pronounced from the rostrum for the first time as the 1999 session's first roll was called in each chamber. Surrounded by a larger-than-usual crowd of friends and family, all 188 legislators were sworn in and officially began their terms.

In opening day activities, Senator Thomas V. Mike Miller, Jr. was reelected and sworn in for his thirteenth year as Senate President, becoming the longest-serving President of the Maryland Senate. Senator Norman R. Stone, Jr. was reelected and sworn in for his fifth year as President Pro Tem. In the House, Delegate Casper R. Taylor, Jr. was reelected and sworn in for his sixth year as Speaker. Delegate Thomas E. Dewberry was reelected and sworn in for his third year as Speaker Pro Tem.

Governor Parris N. Glendening and Lieutenant Governor Kathleen Kennedy Townsend attended the opening day ceremonies in the Senate and the House of Delegates.

Legislative activity was light during this first week of session as committee assignments were made official and new and returning members alike opened their Annapolis offices and prepared for the committee work ahead.

Issues

Among the many issues that will be considered during the 1999 session are:

- **Collective Bargaining** - measures to alter Maryland law to include collective bargaining rights for State employees will be considered;
- **Education** - proposals to direct additional funds to public school construction and Maryland's public colleges and universities, to create an entitlement for all B-average high school graduates (a free public college education), and to reward superior teachers and improve the caliber of those going into the teaching profession will be evaluated;
- **Health Care** - ways to streamline regulation of the health care industry to cut costs to the State, as well as to the industry, will be examined;
- **Public Ethics** - additional restrictions on relationships between lobbyists and lawmakers, and a possible rewrite of the ethics statute, have been recommended;
- **Taxes** - increased cigarette and transportation taxes will be considered, as will the implementation of the remainder of a 10 percent cut in the income tax by next year (rather than by 2002);
- **Tobacco** - uses for Maryland's \$4.2 billion share of the national settlement with tobacco companies (\$150 million or more each year), including possible tax cuts and education initiatives, will be debated;

- **Transportation** - an attempt to lower Maryland's standard for drunk driving, from a blood alcohol content of .10 percent to .08 percent may be made, and proposals to increase transportation taxes will come up as a way to fund building roads and meeting additional mass transit demands; and
- **Utility Deregulation** - changes in the law to allow competition in the electric-power industry will continue to be evaluated as a possible way to cut costs to consumers and make it easier for utilities to continue operating in Maryland.

Next Week

The inauguration of the Governor and the Lt. Governor is scheduled for January 20 at noon. Gubernatorial legislative initiatives will appear soon after that date. The Governor's State of the State Address is scheduled for January 21 at noon. The election of the State Treasurer by the General Assembly has been scheduled for January 22 at 11:00 a.m. in the House Chamber.

Chief Judge Bell will deliver the State of the Judiciary Address on January 26.