



The LEGISLATIVE WRAP-UP

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The 415th session of the General Assembly of Maryland convened at noon on Wednesday, January 10, marking the official beginning of the 2001 session. 2001 is the third year of the four-year term served by both Senators and Delegates.

Opening Day

Opening day ceremonies, according to legislative rules and tradition, began with the organization of each house. President of the Maryland Senate, Thomas V. Mike Miller, Jr., the longest serving President in the history of the Senate, was reelected for the fifteenth year. Senate President Pro Tem, Ida G. Ruben, will begin her second term in that office, and Senator Norman R. Stone, Jr. will continue for a second year as President Pro Tem Emeritus. The Maryland House of Delegates confirmed Casper R. Taylor, Jr. as Speaker. Speaker Taylor was first elected to lead the chamber in 1994. Delegate Thomas E. Dewberry was sworn in for a fifth year as Speaker Pro Tem. Governor Parris N. Glendening and Lieutenant Governor Kathleen Kennedy Townsend joined other dignitaries such as U.S. Senator Paul Sarbanes and Congressman Steny Hoyer, families, and friends to lend support and express warm wishes for the session. There were no new members of either chamber at the beginning of the 2001 session.

Issues

Approximately 2,500 bills and resolutions will be introduced and considered before adjournment *sine die* on April 9. Among the many potential laws to be examined are those related to the lobbying provisions of the Maryland Ethics Law, the blood alcohol limits for drunk driving, racial profiling, and discrimination based on sexual orientation. Other bills will address expanding health care coverage for low income adults and lowering prescription drug costs for senior citizens. Debate will also extend to increasing expenditures for public schools and other educational programs, as well as to funding of new mass transit and land preservation initiatives. And, in the forefront in keeping with the General Assembly's responsibility to appropriate the money to run State government, the allocation of Maryland's budget surplus of approximately \$375 million and how best to keep Maryland's financial footing on a sound basis will be deliberated.

Miller Building

This week also marked opening ceremonies for the new Miller Senate Building. Named in honor of Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller, Jr., the building was dedicated on Tuesday, January 9, before a large gathering of citizens, Maryland officials, and dignitaries who previously had served in the General Assembly and other areas of Maryland government. This session the new addition to the Annapolis capitol complex will house the four principal Senate committees and their chairmen, vice chairmen, and staff. Attached to the James Senate Office Building by walkways on two levels, the Miller structure also has on the first level spacious meeting rooms, extensive exhibits devoted to Maryland's history and its treasures, and a specially commissioned floor mosaic of the State seal. The Tiffany glass dome created in 1903 by the Tiffany Glass & Decorating Company, formerly housed in the Legislative Services Building, radiates natural light through each floor. Renovation of the c.1939 James building, first constructed as a state office building and refurbished in the 1960s for the Senate, will begin at the conclusion of the 2001 session. The James Building is dedicated to former Senate President William S. James who served in that capacity from 1963 to 1975.

Upcoming

Bill introductions and committee meetings and hearings will continue in Annapolis next week. Briefings are scheduled on a wide variety of issues including health care and HMO coverage, prescription drug costs, Baltimore City Schools, the status of Maryland's higher education

institutions, criminal sentencing policy, juvenile justice, welfare reform, and the status of the poor.

Governor Parris N. Glendening will address the legislature with his annual State of the State address on Wednesday, January 17. The fiscal 2002 State budget will also be introduced that day.