



# The Legislative Wrap-Up

Library and Information Services, Department of Legislative Services

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## OPENING DAY

The 417th session of the General Assembly of Maryland convened at noon on Wednesday, January 8, marking the official beginning of the 2003 session, the first one of the four-year term. The 2003 session is scheduled to conclude in 90 calendar days on April 7. Incoming Governor-elect Robert H. Ehrlich, Jr. addressed both chambers during the opening day's activities. Governor-elect Ehrlich was accompanied by Lt. Governor-elect Michael S. Steele.

The first day was filled with ceremony and symbolism as each chamber commenced with the organization of its body. New members heard their names pronounced from the rostrums for the first time, as the 2003 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. Newly elected legislators number 47 in the House and 12 in the Senate. Of the 12 new Senators, 5 were former House members.

On opening day Senator Thomas V. Mike Miller, Jr. was reelected and sworn-in for his seventeenth year as Senate President. President Miller is the longest-serving President in the history of the body. Senator Ida G. Ruben was elected and sworn-in as President Pro Tem for a fourth year. In the House, Delegate Michael E. Busch was elected for his first year as Speaker. Delegate Adrienne A. Jones became the Speaker Pro Tem. She is the second African American to hold this office. Maryland's United States Senators Paul Sarbanes and Barbara Mikulski also attended the opening day ceremonies.

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 2003 session are:

- *Budget deficits:* Lawmakers must consider a number of options to close this year's gap of \$500 million and next year's of \$1.3 billion.
- *Slot machines and gambling:* Debate will be heavy on legalizing slots to generate revenue to help eliminate revenue shortfalls.
- *Health insurance and health care:* The controversy over CareFirst's conversion to a for-profit entity, as well as the escalating costs of health care and insurance premiums both for doctors and their patients will be closely examined.
- *Death penalty:* The expected reversal of the gubernatorial moratorium on the imposition of the death penalty and the recent study on the inequities of its imposition will generate legislative scrutiny.
- *Education funding and school facilities:* Maryland schools at all levels are bracing for reduction in the State money they receive for programs and school construction.

## COMING WEEKS

Governor-elect Ehrlich's inauguration will be January 15, and gubernatorial legislative initiatives will follow. The State budget bill will be delivered to the General Assembly on January 17. Additionally, in coming weeks a special joint legislative committee will interview candidates for State Treasurer. The General Assembly is charged by the Maryland Constitution to elect that office holder.