

## Local lawmakers talk taxes, wages and drugs

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### Delegate Michael Jackson speaks with an attendee of the Calvert Chamber of Commerce's Legislative Breakfast at the Rod 'N' Reel.

**Chesapeake Beach, MD** - The Calvert County Chamber of Commerce hosted its annual State Pre-Legislative Breakfast Monday morning, Jan. 7 at the Rod 'N' Reel Restaurant in Chesapeake Beach. Four of Calvert's five state lawmakers were in attendance for the meeting with local business and agency leaders. Delegate Mark Fisher [R-District 27C] was unable to attend.

"This is a good team," said Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller Jr. [D-District 27], who added the 2018 campaign is over and the winners, regardless of political party now need to govern. The political wrangling of last year's campaign "doesn't mean we're not friends and don't work together." Miller noted some positives going into the 2019 Legislative Session in Annapolis, which begins Wednesday, Jan. 9. "We have a surplus, a balanced budget, a Triple A bond rating," said Miller.

Republican Jack Bailey, who was elected to the District 29 State Senate seat last November, indicated his "freshman" orientation was proceeding. Bailey pledged to go to Annapolis hoping to obtain more funding for school safety, working to aid small businesses and farmers; and working for the health of the Chesapeake Bay.

After serving out former Delegate Tony O'Donnell's unexpired term, Delegate Jerry Clark [R-District 29C] indicated he was looking ahead to service as a legislator elected by the citizens over the next four years. "I feel a lot more secure and a lot more feisty," said Clark, who was appointed by Maryland Governor Larry Hogan. Clark predicted transportation and the environment could be major local issues on which the General Assembly acts. While he stated that aquaculture could be part of the environmental discussion, Clark added, "I don't think there's going to be an oyster war."

Of the many issues likely to be batted around, the most partisan appears to be a proposed increase in the minimum wage. Bailey indicated the proposed increase to \$15 an hour would be a burden to small business. "The best we can do is small increases," said Bailey.

"I have yet to have a government come into my store and help me pay my electric bill," said Clark, adding that government should not be telling business owners how much to pay employees. "A mandate to me is wrong."

Delegate Michael Jackson [District 27B] said he supports the proposed \$15 minimum wage, "to make sure our citizens can take care of their families."

"This is an issue that's going to pass," said Miller, who explained that many other states have implemented phased-in wage increases. "Ten states have done this," said Miller, who added that Maryland could base the increase on the size of a business and the cost of living. "Hopefully, it will be business friendly."

There was no support from the lawmakers to adopt a measure mandating work schedule predictability. Oregon has passed a law creating such a mandate. In response to a question about possibly lowering the state's corporate tax, Miller said he would rather see the personal income tax rate lowered. "First, let's take care of the homeowner," said Miller.

A question about putting pressure on Exelon to clean up the Conowingo Dam, prompted a rebuke of President Trump by Miller. "We've fighting hard" to get states in the Susquehanna watershed to clean up the river which empties into the Chesapeake Bay. "Donald Trump is our worst enemy on this." Miller said none of Trump's appointees to environmental posts has pressured the watershed states to comply. Clark said he agreed with Miller that the Susquehanna states had to do more to keep the river clean and added that the pressure on Exelon regarding Conowingo Dam should continue. Jackson said he was anxious to see what action the House Environment and Transportation Committee was going to recommend. Bailey, a retired Natural Resources Police officer, said that much of the debris in the Chesapeake Bay is the result of storms. "It's something that's been happening to people down here," Bailey said.

Finding ways to deal with the opioid epidemic will also be a legislative topic in 2019. Clark said state leaders need to answer, "what is it we have in our society that is driving these people to these drugs? We are losing our best and brightest." Miller stated, "we've got the opioid deaths down but the fentanyl deaths are up." Bailey agreed that fentanyl has become as big a concern as heroin. He suggested dealers who sell fentanyl that results in the death of the user be tried for murder. Jackson stressed that it was important that state leaders focus on all substance abuse and not just focus on opioids. "We should have been thinking of this a long time ago," said Jackson.

Students from all four of Calvert County's public high schools attended the Jan. 7 meeting. A student named Kelsy, who is a member of the Calvert High School (CHS) Equity Team said students were concerned with several issues that will be discussed in the Maryland General Assembly this session. The issues include the drug epidemic and the education funding mandates from the Kirwan Commission. On the latter issue, Kelsy stated, "we want to make sure funding is distributed equitably."

In closing, Miller told Chamber members to keep in mind "Annapolis is an entirely different world," adding, "we remember what we hear at this breakfast." Clark pledged to "do what's right for Southern Maryland" during the session. Jackson urged the membership to attend and speak up at committee bill hearings on issues that are important. "We need you to be visible," he said.

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