LEXINGTON PARK, Md. — January 8, 2020, marks the first day of Legislative Session in the state capital, and in preparation, TheBaynet.com spoke with two representatives that serve Southern Maryland with different views but common goals: State Delegates Matt Morgan [R-29A] and Brian Crosby [D-29B].

Across the state, and specifically in Southern Maryland, the highest priority for Democrats and Republicans alike has been identified as determining how education will be funded in response to recommendations provided by the Kirwan Commission.

The Kirwan Commission is a board comprised of 26 teachers, business owners and public figures who have been working since 2016 to rewrite the formula that distributes taxpayer funds towards public education. The commission, led by former University of Maryland System Chancellor Dr. William “Brit” Kirwan, has made what many describe as expensive recommendations to spend over $3.8 billion on public education throughout the new decade, with the costs being roughly split between counties and the state.

“Kirwan is a huge bill that does a lot of good things,” Morgan explained. “Let’s face it, public schools are an important thing… My son graduated and my daughter is still in [public] school, but it is in everyone’s best interest to have the best schools possible.”

As a result of Trump’s Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, federal taxes have been significantly cut, but with that Trump opened up more income to be subjected to state-taxation, plausibly resulting because Maryland tax code follows federal definitions for income. This is likely why people often mention not seeing the results of any federal tax cuts, because Maryland as a state “kept the Trump tax cuts” as Morgan described.

“[The federal tax cuts] were a windfall for the state. They brought in about $750 million,” Morgan said. “In the budget now [with that money], we can fund Kirwan until 2022. 2023 is the year that is a huge problem because the billing jumps. How do we begin to pay for that? I have no idea yet… Gambling currently brings in $60 million, but we are seeing democrats float ideas anywhere from taxing recreational marijuana to the expansion of sports betting.”

Though also unsure of how the bill will get paid for, Crosby recognizes that the bill is going to be a priority for the Southern Maryland delegation, and wants to make sure his constituents get their fair share.

“We need to go through [the Kirwan bill] with a fine tooth comb and make sure that resources are going to come back to St. Mary’s County,” Crosby said. “There are many things that we have done in our county with our superintendent and Board of Education who deserve a lot of credit, that have put us ahead of the rest of the state… I want to make sure that the bill allows us to either re-appropriate those dollars or ensure we get some sort of return for making investments up front, which I think we should.”

Aside from what will likely be a session heavily dominated by education funding formulas, both Delegates have mentioned additional legislation they are hoping to sponsor or co-sponsor in Annapolis.

Morgan says he plans to work with Del. Seth Howard [R-30B], hoping to co-sponsor a bill relating to creating incentives to those purchasing “Long-Term Care Insurance.”

“As you get older, the chances of you having some type of bad accident or disease goes up quite a bit,” Morgan explained. “A lot of these people unfortunately end up on Medicaid, which is very expensive for the state. To me, it’s a smart financial decision for the taxpayer if we give some type of credit creating a financial incentive to purchase Long-Term Care Insurance.”

Crosby has mentioned two pieces of legislation that he hopes to make headway on, while fighting to get necessary state funding to improve the intersection of Route 5/Great Mills Road.

“The first is streamlining the payment system for micro-businesses, which are those with 15 or less employees, that do business with a state entity,” Crosby said. “Right now, we’re seeing that typically, micro-businesses take about 60 to 90 days to get paid from the state. So if you work with any state agency, you wouldn’t see your invoice paid for almost two to three months… a lot of [these businesses] are operating on two weeks to a month cash flow. So what we want to do is mandate that the state pays within 10 or 14 days.”

“The second bill would offset property taxes for 100% disabled veterans,” Crosby explained. “We’re still kind of working through the numbers there… But you know, this is something that would affect our district significantly. It lets them know that we appreciate them and their service a little bit more, and that we want them to stay here within the state.”

Contact Zach at zach.hill@thebaynet.com