

Van Hollen visits SoMD, stopping by naval base, CSM, VFD, and Chamber of Commerce

Posted by [JeroldMassie](#) On 07/31/2019

La Plata, MD – U.S. Sen. Chris Van Hollen Jr. [D-MD] visited Charles County early Friday morning, stopping at multiple locations including, the Naval Support Facility (NSF) Indian Head, the future site of CSM's Velocity Center, and the Charles County Chamber of Commerce among several others.

Kicking off his July 26 trip to Southern Maryland, Sen. Van Hollen stopped at Clarity Coffee House, a woman, minority, and veteran-owned local business that rests right next to The Black Box Theatre in Indian Head. Van Hollen sipped on his latte while he spoke with Evie Hungerford, Chair of the Indian Head Center for the Arts, as they walked into the neighboring theatre.

Following his morning coffee, the senator traveled to NSF Indian Head before heading to the future site of College of Southern Maryland (CSM)'s Velocity Center. Joined by Dr. Maureen Murphy (President of CSM), Maryland State Del. Edith Patterson [D-28], and many other individuals from the senator's office, town, and college, the group looked upon the space that will house future classrooms, conference rooms, and maker spaces of the CSM Velocity Center.

The 13,400 square foot facility sits just off Indian Head Highway and is a part of a partnership between CSM and the Naval Surface Warfare Center Indian Head Explosive Ordnance Disposal Technology Division (NSWC IHEODTD).

Hosting Hackathons, Robotic competitions, and other tech events, Dr. Murphy explained that the new building is a part of CSM's mission, supporting a "very STEMmy community here" in Southern Maryland. The president of the college went on to express how "critical" their partnership with the base is and explained that the workshops, which will include 3D printers, will be open to the public on a membership basis.

With the center set to open its doors this winter, Van Hollen applauded the staff and college for working with the base down the road and the community's businesses to "make this area successful." He went on to point out the presence of Del. Patterson, a representative from Gov. Larry Hogan's office, and Indian Head Mayor Brandon Paulin, explaining that one of the things that's "great about the community here [in Indian Head] is people are all working together in partnership."

Later in the day, Van Hollen traveled to the Waldorf Volunteer Fire Department, sitting down with local VFD leaders and state legislatures to discuss funding, grants, and some issues the departments are having communicating with the Charles County Commissioners.

After the long correspondence at the fire station, the senator went on to meet with a couple of those commissioners, President Reuben B. Collins, II and Gilbert Bowling, III from District 1, along with local business leaders at the Charles County Chamber of Commerce.

Van Hollen attempted to answer questions from the chamber, namely those about infrastructure needs to improve roadways and aid in town improvement projects and those pertaining to land ownership in the county. The senator explained how the grant process works for infrastructure projects and explained that he would help; however, he could to help the county get land along the river back.

The conversation primarily revolved around how Van Hollen and Federal funding affects Charles County and its infrastructure but shifted to a broader conversation on the country's national debt that totals over \$22 trillion. He expressed his desire to address the deficit, pointing to recent tax cuts for recent additions to the country's debt. "I hope we can get to a point where we realize we can't just do this on one side of the equation," the senator stated in reference to a bipartisan effort to reduce the deficit.

One of the ways Congress has cut federal spending in the past is through Base Relocation and Closure or BRAC. Van Hollen brought attention to the fact that NSF Indian Head is now Charles County's largest employer, dethroning the public-school system, multiple times on his trip. With two out of three county economies tied deeply to U.S. naval bases (Charles— NSF Indian Head, St. Mary's—Pax River), the threat of a BRAC in the near or distant future looms over Southern Maryland now, more than ever.

Van Hollen stated that keeping the two bases in Southern Maryland is "vital," explaining that they are "national assets" that "the folks at the Pentagon" need to recognize as being "vital" when the next BRAC happens.

One of the senator's key takeaways from his trip was the need to address the "congestion issues" in the county as it grows, in addition to the importance of NSF Indian Head both locally in the community and as a part of national defense.

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