

# OPINIONS & VIEWS

## THE FEDERATION CORNER

### The Council's Rash Decisions Have Had Big Consequences

*A \$60 Million Surplus Has Been Squandered*

A Message from Federation President, Cary Lamari



This past Tuesday the County Council held a public hearing on supposedly one-time Community Grants for FY-05 year's budget of 3.5 million dollars. The County has depleted its 60 million dollar surplus and is facing a 100 million dollar shortfall in the upcoming fiscal year.

My testimony was from the perspective of fiscal accountability and from a position that priorities must be established.

It is my position that some of the decisions that the council has made, (or is about to make) are contributing to the upcoming budget shortfall.

I am referring, when I say this, to the conference center, to the Clarksburg Jail, the Strathmore Arts Facility, the Black Rock Performing

Arts Center, the Negotiated Union Contracts with the Montgomery County Unions and the School Unions and the Fire Fighters' Unions, etc, etc. And also, of course, the potential impact of Bill 33-06, the Fire Bill, which eliminates all of the volunteer fire fighters.

Decisions of the past have had consequences. This Public Hearing should never have been allowed to take place. It was a theatrical performance produced by Councilman Silverman in an attempt to discredit Councilmembers Phil Andrews and Marilyn Praisner for the sin of demonstrating fiscal discipline.

I testified and was treated with disrespect and contempt by several council members who suggested that, because I have never needed

the services of some of the charitable organizations, apparently I did not have the right to testify on the topic of fiscal accountability and fiscal responsibility.

Should this council fail to demonstrate fiscal accountability and responsibility, the voters, through the Ficker tax amendment, will do it for them and will remove the flexibility of future councils to increase property taxes when necessary.

The public should know what reductions the County Executive is recommending to the County Council--reductions of county programs and services, plus some for the elderly, and others dealing with public safety and essential county services.

I urge everyone to write letters supporting the efforts of Coun-

cilmembers Andrews and Praisner to persuade this council to embrace fiscal reason. They need our support now.

Some At-Large Council members are attempting to discredit these two councilmembers to avoid being held accountable for the fiscal crisis we are beginning to experience.

Also, no resident of this county should be harassed as I was because they feel it necessary to present testimony before this or any government entity. It is difficult enough to participate in the county government process without elected officials harassing and attacking people who go to testify on issues of importance.

The actions of Mr. Subin and others were shameful and they owe

the residents of Montgomery County an apology, especially Mr. Subin for his constant loss of temper and expressions of disrespect towards members of the public who choose to participate in the process of governing.

*The Sentinel Newspapers have offered the Montgomery County Civic Federation (www.montgomerycivic.org) an opportunity to present the issues and opinions of affiliated community organizations. The viewpoints expressed may not necessarily be those adopted by the Federation. Any resident who would like to contribute to this column should contact Federation Delegate Alyce Ortuzar at 301-774-6617.*

## STATE POLITICS

### Sophomore Statesmen Flourish in Second Session

By Ben Shlesinger  
Staff Writer

Last year Annapolis went through a major overhaul. Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. (R) was inaugurated as the Old Line State's first Republican governor in over 30 years and Lt. Gov. Michael S. Steele became the first African-American to win an elected executive office in the history of Maryland.

Naturally, the arrival of these two men in their offices garnered a lot of attention.

Much less noticed, however, was the arrival of two new legislators who moved into the State House with little fanfare.

Now in their second sessions, though, Senators Rona Kramer (D-District 14) and Robert Garagiola (D-District 15) are quickly putting down roots and trying to mature into effective lawmakers.

#### Senator Rona Kramer

Flashback to your college days for a sec-

ond. Remember how you spent that first year just trying to stay alive in new surroundings, and then you came back sophomore year and thought you owned the place?

That train of events often holds true even outside of the University setting. But not for Sen. Rona Kramer. When asked whether she feels capable of putting her foot down on issues during this, her second legislative session, Sen. Kramer seemed surprised at the thought.

"I felt fairly strongly about that last year," Kramer said. "I'm sure that every year that I'm here it will make it that much easier to do those things. But I started off doing that, putting my foot down and being aggressive."

Two weeks into last year's session, a bill came out that, if it had passed, would have given certain banks the option to no longer return checks to their customers. With all the new advances in banking like online accounts and the such, this may not have seemed like such a big deal to many computer-savvy con-

sumers. But to elderly residents, a change like this was not in their best interests.

Senator Kramer recognized that this bill would be a big burden to her constituents, many of whom, she said, are elderly. Kramer stepped out of her comfort zone to fix that problem.

"I was only two weeks into the session last year when that came up. But I realized that it wasn't good and I wasn't happy letting it go," Kramer said.

She stuck to her guns, and today elderly banker customers still receive their used checks (or full-size facsimiles thereof) back from the banks the old-fashioned way.

While the Senator was not surprised that she was able to stand her ground on certain issues, one thing that did catch her off-guard was "[t]he extent to which a single Senator could be a part of, and influence, the [decision-making] process."

"I really didn't expect," Kramer added, "that any individual, especially someone new,

could affect the government and the process to the degree that I found we did."

During the legislative session just prior to her first, the Maryland legislature passed a bill that would have increased the wages paid to community workers in homes for the disabled.

At the time, people who worked in institutions earned more money than their counterparts employed in home settings. Senator Kramer supported that bill's approach because she felt it was inequitable to pay people different salaries when they were doing essentially the same job.

But last year, in the face of massive state-wide budget cuts, a proposal was put forth to stop the increases. Welching on those raises was not something Kramer was willing to do.

"I felt that it was only fair that those wage increases take place. And because of my position on the Health and Human Services subcommittee in Budget and Taxation, I was able to hold the line and I think it influenced other legislators," she said.

Clearly, Senator Kramer, is willing to put her foot down when it matters. Kramer made her mark last year and it will be interesting to see

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