DELEGATE ERIC EBERSOLE
DISTRICT 12

THE CONNECTION:
LEGISLATIVE NEWSLETTER - Pre-session 2017

PERIODIC NEWSLETTER TO KEEP YOU INFORMED AND UP TO DATE WITH POLITICAL HAPPENINGS IN ANNAPOLIS AND IN HOWARD AND BALTIMORE COUNTIES

THE ENVIRONMENT: FRACKING & CLEAN ENERGY JOBS

OPEN TRANSPORTATION INVESTMENT DECISIONS

ELECTION LAW

EDUCATION – KIRWAN COMMISSION

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Our Environment: Fracking and Clean Energy Jobs - Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard Revisions

Fracking – In the 2015 session the legislature passed a moratorium on horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing (aka fracking) as a means to extract natural gas from the Earth. The arguments against fracking are clear. The dangers to drinking water and the surface environment are well documented. There are even anecdotal accounts for increased earthquake activity in places like Oklahoma where the practice is prevalent. The mail I receive, both from our district and from the potentially impacted areas of Western Maryland, are uniformly against allowing this practice here in our state. The long term value of beauty and tourism far outweigh the perceived short term benefits of this gas extraction. We asked for a short two year moratorium, because we were hopeful we could get the governor's signature without a serious fight. We were right. But now we must renew this moratorium as it runs out in October of 2017. Expect to see this effort in the news during session this winter.

Clean Energy Jobs - We have had quite a fight on this one. This bill, which I co-sponsored, increases the annual percentage requirements for Tier 1 Non-solar and Tier 1 Solar sources to meet the State's Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard (RPS). Total RPS percentage requirements increase to 25% by 2020, instead of 20% by 2022. This means more energy from clean sources. It also means more jobs in this area of the energy industry, the area that has the best longevity for the future. So, in addition to being environmentally conscious, it will create jobs that will last for generations. So why is it in the legislative preview letter for the 2017 session? Well, let's talk about the fight I mentioned. We passed this bill in 2016 and Governor Hogan promptly vetoed it. In fact, he surprised us a bit here with his opposition to this win/win legislation. We are working to override his veto and the governor is spending a lot of valuable time trying to stop us. Count on my vote to override and keep Maryland on the vanguard of energy and jobs for the future.

Here is a link to the bill so you can be fully informed:
http://mgaleg.maryland.gov/webmga/frmMain.aspx?id=hb1106&stab=01&pid=billpage&tab=subject3&ys=2016RS

The Maryland Open Transportation Investment Decision Act

This one is even tougher. This bill, which I fully supported, establishes state transportation goals requiring the Transportation Department, in accordance with specified project-based scoring system, to rank major transportation projects for inclusion in the draft and final Consolidated Transportation Program. It goes on to allow the scoring system to be superseded by the governor if his priorities differ, but the requires public explanation. We passed the bill in 2015 and the governor promptly vetoed it. The legislature, just as promptly, overrode the veto. Not satisfied with this constitutional process, the governor plans to submit a bill in 2017 to repeal the measure and has used his energy to engage in a public fight, taking valuable time and effort to develop politically clever and deceptive names like "road kill bill." I must tell you, sadly, that it is my opinion that this is but one facet of an attempt to mislead about the nature and intent of the transportation rating system legislation. The bill will NOT stop transportation projects in our community. The scoring system it created is one that favors projects that benefit the most people in the best way. If the governor uses his power to kill a project, it is his decision alone and he should explain it. I sense he is planning to use this power and he wants to deflect responsibility. This is simply a bill about transparency which is, to me, a cornerstone of politics. This bill can only help with road and transportation projects in our state and that is I why I supported it and will not vote to repeal it.

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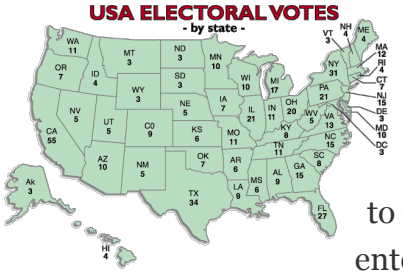
Here is a link to the bill and associated information so you can be correctly informed.
http://mgaleg.maryland.gov/webmga/frmMain.aspx?id=hb1013&stab=01&pid=billpage&tab=subject3&ys=2016RS

Campaign Finance, Voter Registration and the National Popular Vote

Campaign Finance – I will re-introduce a bill that seeks to limit the effect of the Citizens United decision on Maryland elections. This bill will reduce the ways that secret, corporate donors can affect our elections and limit big money in our campaign process. This will be the third year I have introduced the bill, which I am told by my veteran colleagues is not uncommon. This time we have some real support among the members for the bill and I am optimistic that we will see it become law. It will help to slow the onslaught of big money that has been precipitated by Citizens United, and given the attitude of the incoming president and his potential Supreme Court nominees, this type of persistent effort will be critical to keep our elections fair.

Voter Registration – Last session we introduced a Universal Voter Registration Act, aka the Freedom to Vote Act, which would have enabled automatic registration of individuals when they use state agencies like the MVA, while of course giving everyone an option to opt out. The bill was changed dramatically before passage and did not encourage registration in a significant way. We will try this measure again with better emphasis on getting people registered. Again, given the wave of laws being attempted nationwide at limiting access to the polls and creating hurdles to registration, it is important for Maryland to be a state that is about supporting and encouraging the democratic right to vote for all. Look for it again in the news this winter.

National Popular Vote - Many have, for years, felt that the electoral college has lost its necessity and, in fact, gives some states too much significance and power in a presidential election. The dual outcomes of the recent presidential election have, yet again, highlighted this and I have received plenty of mail on this issue. The process of a constitutional amendment to change this is burdensome and unlikely to be successful. However, Maryland was the first state to enter into a potential agreement among states that addresses this very issue. Under the agreement, states will commit all their electoral votes to the national vote winner, not the winner of their state. When enough states enter in to represent at least 270 electoral votes, this agreement will activate among all participants and the candidate who wins the national popular vote will get all the electoral votes needed to win. At this state there are nearly 200 votes represented in participating states. Efforts are being made to get more on board. There was an effort in 2015 to pass legislation to pull Maryland out of the group, but we defeated it easily. Now we will work for the needed states to come on board.



Education – Kirwan Commission and Pre-K

In 2002, Maryland created the Thornton Commission. It was created to look at state funding formulas and program decisions for education. The recommendations, which were fully instituted by 2006, were sweeping and the resultant changes brought Maryland schools to be ranked #1 nationally. The bill called for the state to re-evaluate after a decade, and now the Kirwan commission has convened. It will re-evaluate and update the formulas and programs and make revised recommendations. The commission will meet periodically and report next summer so keep an eye for it in the news. One area of attention that will get plenty of attention is universal pre-k. The return on investment of one or two years of instruction before kindergarten is substantial and I am in favor of expanded access. In fact, I will introduce legislation this session that will assist the Kirwan commission with its work toward that goal.

LET ME HEAR FROM YOU:

As always, I love hearing from my constituents- whether you have opinions on any legislation, have an idea for a bill that should be introduced, or need help with any government agency, please feel free to contact my office any time.

Best,

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