

Warren's Window

March 27, 2007, Issue #8

A View of Annapolis

Greetings from Annapolis!

Welcome to the eighth edition of *Warren's Window*. I'm writing this weekly newsletter to keep you updated on the work of the Maryland General Assembly. I hope that you will find *Warren's Window* both useful and informative.

As always, I love hearing from constituents on issues facing Howard County and the state of Maryland. Please feel free to contact me to share your views on critical issues or whenever I can be of assistance to you. You can reach me by phone at (410) 841-3582 or by email at warren.miller@house.state.md.us.

Your Friend and Delegate,
Warren Miller

OPENING THOUGHTS

I am truly sorry and remorseful for many of my actions as I look back on my life. I am sorry for some things I did and for some things I didn't do when I should have. I take personal responsibility for my mistakes and at the end of the day I make the choice to move on. Recently a resolution was introduced asking the state of Maryland to apologize for its role in slavery. I understand the human suffering involved and obviously abolishing slavery was the right thing to do and should have been done sooner. Yet here we are generations later and once again confronted as if no restorative action ever took place.

I voted against the move for an apology for several reasons. I am not able to apologize for something done by someone I never met... unless I am guilty by association and relation. Wouldn't that be like punishing the child

next door because you do not get along with their parents? And what good will come from the act of apology? We cannot rewrite history by saying we are sorry. If we are to move forward and achieve racial equality, don't we have to get past the past? I agree with the humane treatment of all. I adhere to the command to "love thy neighbor". I don't take responsibility for the actions of my ancestors, nor do I assume the right to speak an apology on their behalf.

This apology sets race relations back decades in my opinion. It turns a blind eye to all the efforts made to level the playing field. I wonder if it will ever be over. The scariest notion was voiced by a proponent of the bill. His words were "this is a good start." What does he mean a good start? I thought that issuing an apology shifted the responsibility to the person to whom the apology is directed. The options at that point are limited, either accept or reject the apology. Once forgiveness is achieved,

the issue is dead. An apology is not a start; it is a finish. Let's be done with this issue and move forward.

NOBODY GETS THE "GET" BILL

House Bill 324 opens the door to governmental interference in the affairs and traditions of religious expression. HB 324 and the Senate version SB 533 present some real constitutional issues. These bills would abandon our long-standing tradition of "separation between church and state" and force religious leaders to follow government mandates. This is a slippery slope that we ought to avoid.

The bills require that Jewish men agree to give their former wives a full divorce, which is a situation of contention within the Jewish Orthodox faith. In Jewish Orthodoxy, a man can withhold the right for his former wife to remarry, and if she does so against his wishes, she and her children are outcasts from their faith. This renders the female helpless and the male in a position of tyranny. This clause is known as the "Get" and it is based on a scripture in the Torah found in Deuteronomy chapter 24. The language in that scripture clearly states that a man shall give his wife a writ of divorce. It is not written in negotiable language; it is absolute. Somehow, though, men have parlayed this commodity into a powerful bargaining chip. Many women have suffered physical, emotional, and mental abuse while their husband withholds their release and reaffirms to them cruelly "you will always be my wife". This is certainly behavior that must be corrected; however, it is not the civil government's job to do it.

This is where it is important to understand our constitution and the deep

religious heritage of the founding fathers. Additionally, the rabbinical leaders must have the courage to stand up to the big contributors and synagogue supporters and simply tell them the truth of the passage in Deuteronomy and require them to relinquish it to their spouse. Really, since this has been reduced down to contention over a commodity, why not settle the whole thing with a prenuptial agreement while all parties are in love and have the best interest of one another at heart? If settling this problem were the issue, that would suffice. I see this trail leading to another horizon. Once the state gets its claws into the affairs of religion, what is next? Will a Mohel be required to have a medical degree before he can perform circumcision? Will we need lifeguards at baptism services where the religion believes in full immersion? You tell me where it stops.

Perhaps it is all about the government redefining the basic values traditionalists hold dear. If we allow the government to ignore the "separation of church and state" and only remember it when it renders the church powerless, we are just not getting the big picture. If the government is allowed, even encouraged, to delve into church affairs, soon they will tell the church what to preach and teach and when or where to hold services. Is that the kind of America we want?

THE BAD – TAKE PART IN A BANNED ACTIVITY TO HELP CHILDREN GET INSURANCE

While House Bill 754 seems to be intended to help families in our great state of Maryland, many see imminent danger around the next corner. Currently Maryland's Children's Health Insurance

Program (MCHIP) covers children who otherwise would have no coverage. Fundamentally, I agree with helping children and their hard-working but poor parents. I qualify that statement by adding that I look at “help” as a long-term benefit, not a short-term fix with deadly consequences. Sadly, HB 754 is merely a short-term feel good fix.

800,000 Marylanders are uninsured and we need to work to reduce that number as quickly as possible. This bill accomplishes that goal, however, as they say, “the juice is not worth the squeeze”. The passage of this bill will immediately offer coverage to families of four with an annual income of \$82,000 or 400% of the poverty level. This doubles the current level of 200% of the poverty level. This will result in another 100,000 recipients of assisted health care. Additionally the passage of this bill will create a special fund that will annually subsidize Prince George’s Hospital, keeping them afloat. The treatment of large numbers of uninsured patients has placed the hospital in a financial bind and this bill will ease the ongoing burden. So far, the benefits of this bill seem hard to dispute.

But remember, help is not a short-term proposal; one must take a long-term view of the situation and make judgments accordingly. The ugly part of this bill comes in the area of funding. It was the best wisdom of this Democrat-controlled legislative body to fund an increasing problem with a decreasing revenue source. All the benefits of this bill will be funded by an additional \$1 tax on every pack of cigarettes sold in Maryland. At first glance it may not seem so bad, particularly if you are not a smoker. However a closer long-term view reveals grave danger. Let’s place this funding source in light of the

impending smoking ban soon to be law in the state. On one hand, we promote health by means of quitting a bad habit; on the other hand, we are providing health care based on the number of cigarettes smoked...what’s wrong with that picture? Isn’t that like Jenny Craig using the profits from her candy business to promote her diet plan? What do we really want? If we are paying for health care to cover Maryland’s poorest children by cigarette money, why are we banning the public consumption of the product? Shouldn’t we offer some type of credit to smokers based on the number of packs smoked? Maybe the state should print some tee-shirts for smokers to wear so all the insured children will look up to them for paying for their health coverage. It just seems stupid!

It gets worse. Personally, I believe that people will slowly catch on and many will quit smoking, which will create a deficit in the funding source. On top of that, the number of recipients receiving benefits will increase with our growing population. When these circumstances collide the result will be another increase in taxes. It will be a steady, predictable funding source and after all, it is for the children. HB 754 is a wolf in sheep’s clothing.

MORE BAD - VOTING - THE RIGHT YOU CAN’T LOSE NO MATTER HOW HARD YOU TRY

In many cultures the right to vote is taken very seriously and citizens go to great lengths to exercise their rights to participate in government. Voting is a right that comes with certain responsibilities. Personally I believe that responsible citizenship is something that should be expected from every voter.

One should hope that the right to vote would not extend to any group of citizens who have not demonstrated good citizenship. Responsible representative government results from responsible voters.

Currently Maryland law prohibits anyone convicted of an “infamous crime” (felony, treason, perjury, or any crime involving an element of deceit, fraud, or corruption) from voting in Maryland’s election process. If the connection between responsible government and responsible citizenry can be made, this is the reason. It was the intent of the authors of our state law to minimize the threats to our system and they viewed the votes of criminals who fell into certain categories to be potentially damaging. Think about it, if you want speeding legalized, you would elect someone whose driver’s license has been revoked; it just makes sense to vote for someone who shares your values or lack thereof. By broadening our voter base to allow voting by convicted felons and those convicted of treason (betrayal, sedition, disloyalty), we might be headed for a peril seen by the authors of the original law which banned them from participating. Of course I believe that people can change and I know that many regret the mistakes of their past. However, most responsible people understand the ongoing consequences of their actions and they are mature enough to live with them.

When you combine this expansion of the voter base to include even those convicted of treason with the hazards of a week-long spree of early voting, you have concocted a lethal cocktail which will have us all reeling. Sure, there is the possibility that these convicted criminals will behave or perhaps they simply won’t try to figure out ways to defraud

our system but exactly how likely (or unlikely) is that possibility? Let’s face facts. We will have thousands of convicted criminals legally casting their votes for people who share their values.

THE UGLY – WHAT PART OF “ILLEGAL” DON’T THEY UNDERSTAND?

The illegal immigration problem has come to a boiling point in Annapolis and it seems that some have been overcome by the heat. Not only are we condoning illegal aliens within our borders so they can perform cheap labor, we are now offering them in-state discounts on college tuition. Governor O’Malley said something to the effect that we owed it to them to help educate them. In other words, we want to create a highly educated illegal population.

Some will argue that one requirement for the discounted tuition is applying for citizenship. Isn’t that a bit out of order? If you think about it, applying for citizenship is vastly different than actually being a citizen. I can’t pilot a plane even if I can prove I have applied for a flying lesson. Others will argue that illegal students have to graduate from a Maryland high school to receive the discounted tuition and somehow that makes it all right. I just shake my head and wonder if nobody else sees it. Why are they here illegally in the first place? What does the word “illegal” mean anyway? Citizenship is a privilege many have struggled for over a period of years and this bill encourages others to butt in line. The final part of the litmus test is to show that the student or his guardian has had Maryland income tax withheld in the previous year. Basically, an illegal alien living in DC whose parents worked for 3 hours in

Maryland and had tax withheld now qualifies for in-state tuition.

This bill also offers a benefit for illegal aliens that is not offered to legal residents. An illegal alien can leave the state for 3 years and come back and still receive the discounted tuition. Children of legal residents cannot do this. Should we have a reward waiting for illegal activity? These people are breaking the law of our land. While I am sure that our immigration policies could be improved a bit, it is still the system we have in place. The illegal population in Maryland has increased by nearly 250,000 in the past 5 years. They are driving on our roads without insurance, using our emergency rooms and not paying, and committing crimes and escaping back to their home countries for asylum. To ask Marylanders subsidize the education for someone who is in violation of the law is brash and disrespectful. We do not even offer these benefits to the children of military families.

Other legal minorities should view this legislation as a threat to their access to higher education. Let's look at this with some common sense. There are only so many seats in each college classroom. Offering in-state tuition to illegal aliens will inevitably fill some of those seats. This will displace a number of legal citizens. Additionally, whenever the demand is increased on a limited supply the price increases and we can expect the cost of a Maryland college education to increase accordingly.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Wondering just how many new taxes have been proposed to date in this legislative session? Here's a list:

Income/consumption taxes: 21

Property Taxes: 9

Business Taxes: 8

As I recall, the Democrats began this year by saying that they were not out to increase the tax burden...what went wrong? It will take a lot of heavy lifting, but we can change the course of Maryland. It will take time, effort and dedication, but I believe in the end it will be worth it.

SPECIAL THANKS...

Thanks once again to my Legislative Aide Ellen Townsend and my Policy Analyst Rick Bowers who help me to research and write this weekly update.

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