



State Roundup, April 11, 2014

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POT DECRIMINALIZATION: Danielle Gaines of the Frederick News Post reports that Frederick County State's Attorney Charlie Smith is saying that [narcotics prosecutors across the state are forming a task force to respond to the state's new marijuana decriminalization bill](#). The Maryland State's Attorneys' Association, of which Smith is president of the board, met Thursday to discuss the new legislation, which police and prosecutors say has critical omissions.

- Montgomery County's police chief says that a Maryland law decriminalizing possession of [small amounts of marijuana won't significantly lighten the enforcement workload](#), reports Ryan Marshall in the Gazette. While the new law can prevent people from having a criminal record for small amounts of marijuana, the department doesn't intend to ignore an illegal substance.

PART II: THE HEALTH EXCHANGE MESS: In the second installment examining Maryland's disastrous health care exchange site launch for MarylandReporter.com, longtime auditor Charlie Hayward, takes a [walk through the status of audits and legal maneuvering to assign blame and recoup money](#). Auditors and lawyers will begin structured, even forensic work, to determine what went wrong and why Maryland's exchange fared so much worse than those in other states.

BUSINESS BENEFITS: Businesses will see more [funds for biotech, research and cyber security tax credits under legislation that passed](#) during the 2014 session of the Maryland General Assembly, reports Kevin James Shay for the Gazette.

- This year, lawmakers in the Maryland General Assembly signaled a growing awareness of the reality that, despite Maryland's many strengths as a place to do business; there is [work to do on](#)

[the issue of competitiveness if our state is to convert its significant advantages](#) into strong economic growth, writes Don Fry for Center Maryland.

GERRYMANDER FIGHT: A coalition of groups [against gerrymandering is hoping laughter will be the best medicine for redistricting concerns](#), reports Meg Tully for MarylandReporter.com. The “Tame the Gerrymander” effort announced Thursday that it had awarded prizes for three political cartoons critiquing Maryland’s new legislative districts.

ED SPENDING VS. SAT SCORES: Maryland education [spending has increased over 100% over the last 40 years, while SAT scores have remained flat](#), writes Mark Newgent for Red Maryland. According to spending and test score data compiled in a Cato Institute report, State Education Tends: Academic and Spending over the Past 40 Years, authored by Andrew Coulson, per pupil spending has increased by 110% percent since 1972 while SAT scores have seen little change.

HIGH- & LOW-LIGHTS: Columnist Blair Lee of the Gazette writes that this year’s Maryland General Assembly session looks workmanlike compared to two years ago when [casino expansion collided with tax hikes and the legislature adjourned with the Senate and House at war](#), the governor condemning both chambers and the state stuck with a “Doomsday Budget.” He offers up his list of major highlights and low-lights of this year’s session.

PLAYING IT SAFE: Opinionator Fraser Smith, writing in the Daily Record, asks, why do we give our legislators a pass during an election year? Should be the other way around. They should be showing us how much they care about us. [They should be firing out new ideas and stimulating discussion. They should be getting](#) something major done — and certainly not fiddling with major issues on the way to doing nothing much. Then we’d have some idea how to vote

FIGHT? VOTE FOR ME: Bethany Rodgers of the Frederick News Post writes about an [amusing incident that took place Monday night in Annapolis as Del. Kathy Afzali took advantage of the scrum](#) of reporters gathering to get more information about the brotherly altercation that took place at the Lowe office building.

ANOTHER CONFRONTATION: Kate Alexander of the Gazette writes about another confrontation that took place Monday night in Annapolis. This one has links to two candidates running for the Montgomery County Council’s 5th District seat. Del. Tom [Hucker, one candidate, has accused a friend of Christopher Barclay, the other candidate, of entering and photographing his Annapolis office](#) while he was on the House floor in the final hours of Maryland’s legislative session.

FREDERICK BUILDING PROJECTS: Frederick County projects to open a new arts venue and expand a center serving disabled people will get a financial boost from the state this year, reports Bethany Rodgers for the Frederick News Post. All told, [the state granted \\$577,000 worth of bond funding requests for Frederick County building, expansion and renovation projects for fiscal 2015](#). Every year, state lawmakers seek to bring home funding for projects in their jurisdictions, and Sen. David Brinkley said he thinks Frederick County has historically done well.

HOWARD BUS DUST-UP: The editorial board for the Sun writes that, easily overlooked in the waning days of the legislative session was a dust-up over how best to manage suburban transit in the Baltimore-Washington corridor. [Howard County announced the creation of a Regional Transportation Agency to oversee bus services, raising the hackles of those who support the existing system run](#) by a private nonprofit group. The result was some hardball lobbying in Annapolis and a budget amendment inserted by Sen. Ed DeGrange to withhold state funding for the RTA until a task force can report on the best future for the local bus system. That, in turn, caused Howard County Executive Ken Ulman to announce he's moving forward with the RTA anyway. As turf wars go, this was relatively minor stuff, but there are some principles involved that deserve a spotlight.

AIDING PRINCE GEORGE'S: WYPR's Fraser Smith and Karen Hosler talk about the [move of a state-level department from Anne Arundel County to Prince George's County](#), and why the decision might not be as driven by growth strategy as officials claim.

FEMA AID FOR SNOW REMOVAL: Maryland will receive federal disaster funding to help pay for [snow-clearing efforts from a February storm that left a foot and a half of accumulation across parts](#) of the region in a single day, the Federal Emergency Management Agency announced Thursday.

GOP CANDIDATES DEBATE: In a state overwhelmingly controlled and governed by the Democratic party, Maryland Republicans sometimes struggle to find a political foothold and exert influence, writes Jeremy Bauer-Wolf for MarylandReporter.com. At the Johns Hopkins University campus Thursday evening, the GOP gubernatorial [candidates were posed questions along that line of thought: Could you work with the other side of the aisle?](#) How do you persuade Democrats to join your line of thinking, and the Republican party? More pertinently: Can you win?

GANSLER AIRS NEGATIVE AD: Attorney General Doug Gansler on Thursday launched the first critical broadcast ad of the 2014 Democratic gubernatorial nomination contest, taking the O'Malley-Brown administration to task for the failed launch of the state's health care insurance exchange.

- Gansler's 30-second radio spot [ends a string of positive ads run by his campaign and that of Lt. Gov. Anthony Brown](#). A third candidate with less money, Del. Heather Mizeur of Montgomery County, has yet to go on the air.
- The [one-minute commercial starts with retired nurse Bonita Spikes discussing her attempts to use MarylandHealthConnection.gov](#), writes Bryan Sears for the Daily Record. Audio of the commercial tops the blogs.

MO CO TO APPEAL ELECTION RULING: Montgomery County will appeal last month's Circuit Court ruling that it violated Maryland election law by using [public money to campaign for a 2012 ballot proposition that eliminated certain collective](#) bargaining rights for police, officials said Thursday, writes Bill Turque for the Post.

COLUMBIA DEMS ENDORSE: Amanda Yeager, of the Sun writes that [after a marathon voting session that lasted into the early morning hours Thursday](#), the Columbia Democratic Club has made its endorsements for this June's Democratic primary elections.

CUMMINGS' DENIALS QUESTIONED: Members of U.S. Rep. Elijah Cummings' staff asked the IRS for information about the election integrity group True the Vote, [calling into question his vehement denials of his involvement in targeting the group](#), writes Mark Newgent for Red Maryland. House Oversight and Government reform Committee Chairman Darrell Issa issued a stern letter to Cummings demanding an explanation.

HOPKINS WORKERS PROTEST: Some 2,000 union workers went out on strike Wednesday at Johns Hopkins Hospital in a protest aimed primarily at [exposing low wages at Baltimore City's second biggest employer and one of the nation's most prestigious hospitals](#), writes Bruce Vail for In These Times.

- "America's best hospital? It's also America's worst paying hospital," said Bob Domuleveicz, a [clinical engineer who said he's worked there for nearly 20 years and planned to stay all day on the picket line](#). Fern Shen writes the story for Baltimore Brew.

Read more: <http://marylandreporter.com/2014/04/11/state-roundup-april-11-2014/#ixzz2yaRmr3eH>
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