Dear Neighbor:

The critical moment of this 90-day session occurred two months before we came to Annapolis, when Donald Trump was elected President of the United States.

On Election Night, I advised my 32-year old niece and nephew to concentrate on an issue they really cared about and to volunteer their time and money. As a state legislator, I told them, I will be in a unique position to protect the people of Maryland against harmful decisions in Washington.

You should judge me and my colleagues by whether we met that obligation.

**SUING THE PRESIDENT – PROTECTING OUR LIBERTIES AND OUR BAY**

 President Trump’s travel ban was challenged by the Attorney General of the state of Washington. Many Marylanders were also affected by this policy – doctors, students, and families. Brian Frosh, our Attorney General, could not bring a law suit on their behalf.

He can now, thanks to House Bill 913, which I introduced. During the floor debate, I stated, “We are in an extraordinary time, this is an important measure, I urge a green [Yes] vote.”

AG Frosh now has the authority to challenge the Trump Administration in court when federal action would hurt Maryland. He must still seek the Governor’s thinking on the matter, but he no longer needs the Governor’s approval.

 Donald Trump’s Environmental Protection Agency could weaken Chesapeake Bay clean-up efforts. Maryland’s AG is now in a position to prevent that from happening.

**PROTECTING A WOMAN’S RIGHT TO CHOOSE HER HEALTH CARE PROVIDER**

Eight days after Donald Trump was elected, I emailed the lobbyist for Planned Parenthood, “I've just started to think about what we could do in Md. if the defunding of Planned Parenthood happens [with a Republican Congress and President]. We should talk.”

That conversation led to House Bill 1083, which requires the Governor to fund the health care provided by Planned Parenthood if the federal government would no longer pay for it. If a woman chooses to seek treatment at Planned Parenthood, she can do so and have it paid for by the State if she is income eligible.

HB 1083 passed both houses of the General Assembly, and Governor Hogan allowed it to become law without his signature. I am proud to have played a leadership role in enacting this measure – the first of its kind in the country.

 During my first term in the House of Delegates, I brought about an initiative that increased funding for both family planning and counseling programs to reduce teen pregnancies. A majority of the legislature, including pro-choice and pro-life members, supported these efforts. This year, however, every Republican in the House voted against HB 1083, joined by one Democrat. Regretfully, broad-based bipartisan support no longer exists for family planning.

**WORKING TO IMPROVE OUR CITY SCHOOLS**

A quality public school system is essential for our city’s future. As you know, City schools faced the largest budget deficit in recent history - $130 million dollars. That gap has been reduced to $30 million by actions of Governor Hogan, the General Assembly, Mayor Pugh, and the school system. I will work this summer on improving academic performance and making parents more aware of schools that are offering a quality education.

Eight schools in the 41st District will be renovated under the first phase of the 21st Century Schools program, which we enacted and funded several years ago. Three renovated schools will reopen next year – Lyndhurst Elementary, Pimlico Elementary/Middle, and Forest Park Senior High. Three will close due to a state requirement that the system’s capacity reflect the decreasing enrollment.

 Both Mary Rodman Elementary and the adjacent recreation center will be renovated at the suggestion of Senator Oaks and myself. Cross Country Elementary Middle will be updated within its existing footprint while looking for space efficiency to address enrollment projections. The 41st District delegation and City Council members Yitzy Schleifer and Rikki Spector helped bring this about.

Our schools are integral to the success of strong neighborhoods. If a school is to be closed, communities should be consulted regarding the facility’s future. I introduced House Bill 1449, which would have required the City to appoint a community task force to make recommendations about a school’s future. Neighbors affected by these closures should be involved - before a recommendation is made that could dramatically change the very fabric of a community.

In response, the City government has agreed to begin formal discussions with a school’s parents, neighbors, and alumni soon after it’s announced that the School Board will vote on closing the school. The future use of the building and grounds will be shaped by these meetings. This process will begin this spring for Langston Hughes, Grove Park, and Northwestern. My 41st District colleagues and I will be very involved.

**KEEPING THE PREAKNESS WHERE IT BELONGS – PIMLICO FRACE TRACK**

I first went to Pimlico Race Track when I was in elementary school. My Cross Country School classmate, Jay Slater, lived at Rogers and Merville, across the street from the top of the home stretch. From his attic window, we would watch the races, including the Preakness.

 Now I’m working with Governor Hogan and Mayor Pugh to keep the Preakness at Pimlico, where it belongs. If the race is moved, the economic benefit it brings to Northwest Baltimore and the entire region won’t come back. There will be no Cleveland Browns to save the day 13 years later, if the Mayflower moving vans take the Preakness trophy, the Woodlawn vase, to Laurel.

 Governor Schaefer understood what the stadiums at Camden Yards meant to the civic confidence of the city. He would think the same about keeping the Preakness at Pimlico.

 I was instrumental in bringing about a study of the future of Pimlico. It was conducted by the Maryland Stadium Authority, which built the Camden Yards stadiums. We must now make the case for using public money to finance part of the cost of rebuilding Pimlico and keeping the Preakness in Northwest Baltimore.

**PROTECTING OUR COMMUNITIES**

The loitering and drug traffic on the corner of Liberty Heights and Gwynn Oak Avenues have been a nuisance in the Howard Park community for too many years. The heart of the problem is the liquor store at that corner. After three homicides occurred there within three days this summer, the community demanded action.

Senator Nathaniel Oaks, Delegates Bilal Ali, Angela Gibson and I responded. We introduced legislation that would affect all liquor outlets in the Liberty Heights corridor. As of July 1, they cannot open before 9 a.m., and they must close by 9 p.m.

**PREVENTING DISEASES CAUSED BY SMOKING AND LEAD PAINT**

Smoking and lead poisoning are leading causes of preventable disease among our children. Over the years, I have fought to reduce these risks.

In spite of the health concerns associated with smoking, nearly a third of inspected Maryland tobacco retailers sell tobacco products to minors, the most vulnerable segment of our population. Enabling the state to levy civil penalties for violations, as House Bill 185 does, would allow punishments to be handled without seeking criminal convictions, ensuring a more effective punishment process without risking the health of children and teenagers. With the passage of my bill, a merchant can now receive a civil or a criminal penalty, depending upon the seriousness of the violation.

On the lead poisoning issue, I’ve been opposed by property owners. This session, however, I worked with landlord and tenant groups to reform the housing court process. Landlords would benefit from House Bill 1487 by having more time to gather documents and other evidence to prove their claims. Tenants would have more time to establish their own defenses. HB 1487 would also weed out landlords that violate laws relating to the presence of lead in their properties. This bill has passed the House but failed in the Senate.

**PROTECTING OUR RIGHT TO VOTE**

A change in the location of a polling place or the procedures governing voter registration can prevent people from voting. This used to be a problem only in Jim Crow states. However, the Montgomery County Board of Elections voted two years ago to move an early voting polling center from a middle-income neighborhood to a more upscale community. After a furor arose, both locations were open for early voting.

The public is entitled to adequate notice before such changes are made. To ensure that happens, I introduced House Bill 353. It requires state or local boards of election to give 48 hours’ notice of a proposed change if it’s on the agenda and post such changes online within 48 hours after they’re made. This legislation has been enacted.

I look forward to discussing these and other issues with you in the months ahead at the many community meetings that my colleagues and I will be attending.

**As I said on the House floor,** **“We are in an extraordinary time.” Let us work together to preserve our liberties and protect and improve our neighborhoods**.