



## Thumbs up, down on 2010 session


[http://www.gazette.net/stories/04162010/poliedi170348\\_32547.php](http://www.gazette.net/stories/04162010/poliedi170348_32547.php)


Among positives: gang legislation; negatives: Dwyer


The 2010 General Assembly is history. It shouldn't come as a surprise that it was a relatively low-key affair, given the dual balms of a recessionary economy and an election year. Yep, it's tough to press for upheaval when every state lawmaker who isn't looking to leave office is up for re-election. Still, there are individuals and actions that made their mark in the past 90 days in Annapolis that warrant a thumbs up or a thumbs down.


 To the legislature for failing to raise the tax on booze sales. Yes, state leaders vowed not to increase taxes or enact new ones in this election year, but a proposal to raise taxes on alcohol was more than reasonable, considering the estimated windfall of \$214 million would have gone toward health services. The tax on liquor hasn't changed since 1955, and the last tax increase on beer and wine sales was in 1972. Talk about buyers heading to D.C. for their purchases was absurd. The powerful beverage lobby can chalk up another victory.

 To Republican Sens. David R. Brinkley and E.J. Pipkin and Dels. Anthony J. O'Donnell and Christopher B. Shank for proposing budget cuts after they were invited to do so by the Democrats. It would have been easy to posture and not come forward, but they did. The senators proposed \$1.1 billion in cuts and the delegates \$830 million, although both figures fell far short of the \$2.5 billion that the Dems suggested they find, to match the spending level the GOP supported at a December meeting.

 To the House for relegating approval of medical marijuana, a proven palliative, to a work group to study how to implement a program. The Senate approved a bill allowing physicians to prescribe the marijuana to long-term patients.

 To Del. Donald H. Dwyer Jr. for his pathetic grandstanding in calling for the impeachment of Attorney General Douglas F. Gansler for issuing an advisory opinion that said Maryland courts would recognize same-sex marriages performed in other states.

 To the House subcommittee that killed the Building Opportunities for All Students and Teachers in Maryland grant program following legitimate concerns over the separation of church and state. The initial bill included a 75 percent tax credit on donations up to \$200,000, but it was amended by the House Ways and Means Committee, which replaced the tax credits with a grant program.

 To House Judiciary Committee Joseph F. Vallario Jr. for failing to bring to a vote a measure to require ignition interlock devices on the vehicles of those convicted of drunken driving. The Senate unanimously approved the legislation, but Vallario — surprise, surprise — imposed his will. Never

mind that a device such as this — the No. 1 priority of Mothers Against Drunk Driving — could save many a life.

👍 To Del. Murray D. Levy, who announced that he won't seek re-election and in the process said it was time to turn over the seat to the next generation. Levy will be missed for his solid service and budget expertise. And a farewell to Sen. J. Lowell Stoltzfus, who is stepping down after 18 years in the Senate, to spend more time with his wife, Sharon, who has Parkinson's disease. Stoltzfus recently cited the "dysfunction" in Annapolis and Washington, D.C., politics.

👍 To the legislature, and particularly strong proponent House Speaker Michael E. Busch, for approving anti-gang legislation. Some Baltimore city lawmakers were unhappy with the language, but armed with the hammer of longer sentences, prosecutors will be in better position to challenge gangs. A measure to boost communication between police and school staff about gang-related activities is welcome.