



Christopher Helmrath

Wanted by employers: A few million skilled workers who won't leave. **3A**

Collateral damage

When a small business owner gets a divorce, the company may be part of the property fight. **7A**

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Bias lawsuit can continue against officials in Harford Co.

By **HEATHER COBUN**
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Federal judges have allowed conspiracy and discrimination claims to proceed against Harford County officials after largely denying motions for summary judgment in ongoing litigation over the treatment of a Muslim retirement community project in Joppatowne.

In their complaint, the plaintiffs contended the county began manufacturing roadblocks after officials heard complaints about the community being "Muslim-only" and including a mosque on site. The county contended officials were not swayed by public outcry but merely enforced the county's code and practices.

The lawsuit, brought by the owners of the subdivision, the nonprofit organizing home sales and a buyer for one of the completed homes, alleges religious discrimination was behind the county's refusals to issue additional building permits, water and sewage permits and use-and-occupancy permits. The lawsuit also names Del. Richard K. Impallaria and former Del. Patrick L. McDonough and accuses them of conspiring with the county to hold up permits.

A federal judge issued an injunction last year ordering the county to issue permits for 14 completed

SEE HARFORD 9A



AP FILE PHOTO/PATRICK SEMANSKY

'The new president is going to have his hands full,' says outgoing Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller Jr. of Sen. William 'Bill' Ferguson, whom Democrats have chosen to succeed him. 'He doesn't realize at this point and time that there is a difference between presiding and legislating.'

STEPPING DOWN, BUT NOT GOING AWAY

Miller discusses his decision, challenges facing his successor and what he still hopes to accomplish

By **BRYAN P. SEARS**
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Senator Thomas V. Mike Miller Jr., who has announced his departure as head of the chamber he has led for more than three decades, said in an interview Friday that he plans to continue to have his "tentacles" on a number of important policy issues as one of 47 senators even as he battles a life-threatening cancer.

In a wide-ranging phone interview, the longest-serving Senate president in Maryland history and in the United States spoke one day after announcing he would step down after 32 years but remain in the Senate.

The Senate president discussed his health and continuing battle with an aggressive stage four prostate cancer that has metastasized to his bones.

Miller also discussed the transition of power in his chamber and the big-

gest challenge that immediately faces his presumptive successor, Sen. William "Bill" Ferguson, as he tries to establish his leadership team and balance important regions of the state.

This interview has been edited for clarity and conciseness. The full version can be found at TheDailyRecord.com.

The Daily Record: What was it like this morning, a day after announcing

SEE MILLER 5A

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FILE PHOTO
Aimee Martin, the CEO of Mile-Marker, one of the Maryland firms participating in the Japanese trade mission.



Md. health firms looking to Japan

By **TIM CURTIS**
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Seven Maryland firms flew to Tokyo last week looking for new sales and connections as part of a state Department of Commerce program designed to help small businesses.

The health care companies took up residence in the Maryland booth

at the Medical Japan Tokyo international medical device and elderly care expo.

"It just made sense for various industries. We know we live in a global world, in order for us to grow locally and make sales, we have to look beyond our borders," said Signe Pringle, an assistant secretary of commerce. "Obviously, the Medical Japan (expo)

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Wanted: Skilled workers – who won't leave

It was the big headline recently: The U.S. unemployment rate fell to 3.5 percent, its lowest level in 50 years, according to the Department of Labor.

For those affected by the labor supply, it was unsurprising news that inspired me to return to a theme I mentioned briefly in my last column — that labor shortages are the No. 1 threat to growth and profitability in the economy right now, and this predicament promises to remain for years to come.

This situation does present an opportunity — and a new consideration — for a group in particular: investors in the M&A capital markets. At SC&H Capital, we perform the research and follow-through to arrange successful mergers and acquisitions. I am already seeing an increasing number of prospective investors/buyers asking themselves the question, “If I make this acquisition, can I maintain the current key employee base and can I add more of these skilled workers?”

This current paradigm changes some of the past logic on the driving forces for mergers and acquisitions: Buying may not be just for cash flow or market reach, but for something whose value has suddenly shot up: the employee base.

Qualified employees

There are some flaws in how the Bureau of Labor Statistics counts bodies in these employment surveys and reports. The way the department counts doesn't reflect the many Americans who have



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simply given up looking for work or are underemployed with a part-time job. That number has actually increased since 2000. Real employment as a percentage is lower than it was 15 years ago, even though the population has increased.

Those apparently invisible people probably cannot be a solution for companies short-staffed in a tight labor market. It isn't a question of not being able to find a body for an open position, it's about finding a qualified person.

Any discussion of full employment has to accept some politically incorrect facts: There's a certain percentage of the potential workforce that is essentially unemployable — perhaps because they choose not to work, they have health issues, or they have a track record of criminal behavior.

I talked recently with the president of Ohio's third-largest bank about the issues facing his customer base, and he said the top concern among his clients is the labor force. If businesses can't attract people to do the work they need done, they can't survive, let alone grow.

Keeping their trained employees is another

problem. As a result, companies are trying to sweeten the pot, outside of wages, for the employees they have, offering things like better perks, profit-sharing, and tuition reimbursement to build on employees' skills. But people can still jump ship at any time.

STEM fields

Employers have been complaining about a skilled worker shortage for some time, particularly workers with advanced degrees in STEM fields. But according to a recent study in the Los Angeles Times and data from other sources, nearly every industry now has a labor shortage. The twist: Employers are having a harder time filling blue-collar positions than professional positions that require a college education.

For example, home health care aides, restaurant workers and hotel staff, and skilled labor, including mechanics and plumbers, are a dying breed. More Americans are seeking the degrees they need to take professional jobs, while blue-collar, working-class baby boomers are retiring en masse.

But what about the historically healthy stock market? Unfortunately, it's pretty meaningless for the larger economy. Gains on Wall Street benefit only a small percentage of Americans in a society with increasing income inequality.

Productivity is up, right? No, actually it's down. Despite the dubious means of measurement, even the government

admits to this now. U.S. worker productivity slowed in the second quarter as productivity in the manufacturing sector declined by the most in nearly two years.

More companies are realizing that productivity should no longer be the holy grail of metrics. After Walmart thinned its staff in the name of profitability, store performance suffered, so it reversed course and started hiring more people to offer better service. The result? The customer-satisfaction outcome was better and sales and profits rose.

What other strategies are there to address the labor problem? Should a company move to a location to escape the STEM staff shortages on the two coasts or the lack of building contractor workers in the South?

That's easy enough for services industries, which can operate from anywhere (think of all the call centers or payment processing firms in North Dakota), but not for manufacturing, which can't afford the millions of dollars it would cost to relocate machinery and shipping terminals.

Until there's a solution, we're going to see a game of employment musical chairs. The bottom line is that the entrepreneurs who figure out how to overcome this challenge will be the winners, and they may very well be those savvy M&A buyers.

Christopher Helmrath is the managing director of SC&H Capital, the investment banking and advisory practice of SC&H headquartered in Sparks.

Poll: Most in Maryland want Bay Bridge expansion

By KATHERINE SHAVER AND EMILY GUSKIN

The Washington Post

A 55 percent majority of Maryland residents favor building a third span at the Chesapeake Bay Bridge, a Washington Post-University of Maryland poll finds, as backups at the crossing have recently stretched up to 14 miles amid a long-term repair project.

The support is relatively widespread, with slightly more — over 6 in 10 in favor — in Howard and Anne Arundel counties combined, the latter where the bridge touches down on the western shore.

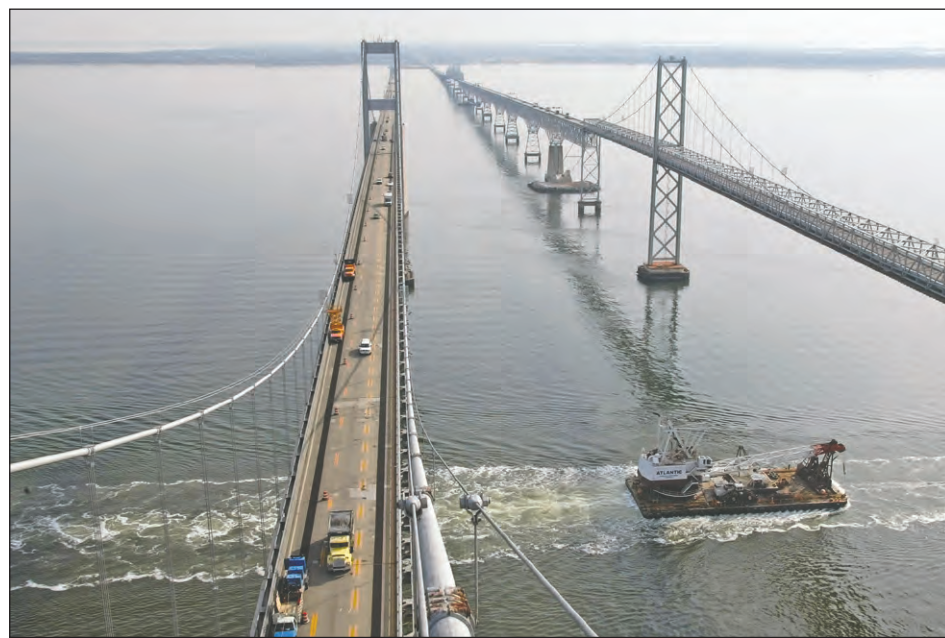
A slimmer 51 percent majority of Marylanders support Gov. Larry Hogan's plan to add express toll lanes to Interstate 270 and the state's part of the Capital Beltway, according to the poll conducted earlier this month. Support drops to a combined 45 percent in Montgomery and Prince George's counties, where the highways are located.

That's a drop from 55 percent of residents in both counties who supported the toll lanes in a Post-Schar School poll in May. However, it is higher than in a 2018 Post-U. Md. poll that found a combined 41 percent of registered voters in Montgomery and Prince George's supported express toll lanes. The 2018 poll question did not specify that the highways' existing lanes would remain free.

The latest poll, conducted by The Washington Post and the University of Maryland's Center for Democracy and Civic Engagement, finds support for another Chesapeake Bay crossing spans party lines. A 58 percent majority of registered Republicans favor the idea, as do 53 percent of Democrats and 57 percent of independents.

Support for adding a third span to the Bay Bridge ranges from 52 percent in Baltimore city and county combined, 55 percent in Prince George's and Montgomery counties, 63 percent in Anne Arundel and Howard counties together and 55 percent among residents in other parts of the state.

“It's all about infrastructure — that's



FILE PHOTO/AP

Support for a third span for the Chesapeake Bay Bridge is relatively widespread across the state, a new poll finds.

something that seems to be neglected around the country today,” said Jeff Davis, 63, a retired mail carrier who lives in Upper Marlboro.

In addition to an expanded Bay Bridge and toll lanes, Davis said, he'd like to see better mass transit options to reduce traffic.

“It's all about moving people and commerce,” Davis said. “We spend so much time in traffic around here. I think we need a comprehensive transportation system.”

Overall, Marylanders rank transportation as one of the state's less pressing problems, with 10 percent citing road and transit issues as their chief concern. That is about even with those who consider taxes and affordable housing as the top issue and below those who name crime (22 percent) and public education (20 percent).

The state is conducting a \$5 million federally required study to assess the potential environmental impacts of building a third span. It would augment the original two-lane span, built in 1952, that car-

ries eastbound traffic and the three-lane westbound span that opened in 1973. Both are about four miles long.

State officials haven't said how much a new crossing would cost or how the state would pay for it. However, a top state official told the Baltimore Sun in

2018 that it could cost up to \$10 billion. The poll did not ask whether Marylanders would be willing to pay higher tolls or taxes to fund a bridge expansion but instead whether they would support the project when “considering state government budget priorities.”

It's unclear why support for Hogan's plan to add toll lanes to I-270 and the Beltway dropped compared to the May poll.

The proposal has come under criticism from environmental groups and leaders in Montgomery and Prince George's, who say widening the Beltway east of I-270 would destroy homes and environmentally sensitive parkland while doing too little to encourage mass transit use.

Support for the toll lane plan varies according to income levels. Nearly 6 in 10 residents with a household income of \$100,000 or more favor the lanes. But support falls to half for those making \$50,000 to \$100,000 and to about 4 in 10 for those earning less than \$50,000.

The poll was conducted by phone Oct. 9-14 among a random sample of 860 Maryland residents. The overall results have a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 4.5 percentage points.

The Washington Post's Scott Clement contributed to this report.

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