

# TRYING TO INSTILL BASIC SENSITIVITY

## MD. LAWMAKERS GET THE WORD: OUT WITH INNUENDO AND KEEP YOUR HANDS TO YOURSELF

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Baltimore County Del. Jon S. Cardin had an epiphany of sensitivity this week after attending a sexual-harassment prevention training seminar for Annapolis lawmakers.

Cardin, a 37-year-old Democrat, realized he is "kind of a touchy person" and that it's best he keep his hands to himself - even if his friendly shoulder grasp wasn't at all meant to convey romantic interest.

He also added a new term to his vocabulary, "elevator eyes," vowing to forever banish its related behavior from his social repertoire.

"I learned [I'd] rather be safe than sorry," Cardin said, before demonstrating that elevator eyes involve a head-to-toe body scan.

Cardin was among the 141 members of the House of Delegates ordered by Speaker Michael E. Busch to sit this week through one of three hourlong training programs led by a staff member of the National Conference of State Legislatures. Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller urged his 47 members to attend one of the sessions designed to make sure state lawmakers are attuned to changing times and mores.

Annapolis - testosterone-charged since some of the nation's Founding Fathers strolled the State House halls more than three centuries ago - is a bastion of boys no more. Women make up more than a third of the House and a quarter of the state Senate, and are, of course, as capable as men of sexual impropriety.

Though the composition of the Capitol has started to catch up with the population at large, bad behavior still abounds - sometimes quietly, sometimes for all to see. Last year, Comptroller William Donald Schaefer's wandering gaze - and his order to one young female gubernatorial aide to "walk again" as he ogled her backside - made national news.

In Washington, Rep. Mark Foley's sex scandal with underage congressional pages put officials on notice.

So Maryland legislative leaders have put out a call for decorous behavior - or at least an education in what is proper.

But Miller, who is quick to wink at reporters, members and visitors from the rostrum he has ruled for two decades, isn't hiding his reluctance to commune with colleagues about feelings. Though he said in several recent Senate sessions that lawmakers should show up for the seminar, and that he is planning to attend, he also hinted that the General Assembly's older dogs - at 64, himself included - might have trouble learning new tricks.

"Three days just to learn and listen and understand how the world functions and how we need to adjust," Miller told his chamber recently, before cautioning, "That's going to be very difficult for some of us with white hair."

Senators exploded in laughter.

Meanwhile, the guffaws from yesterday's closed-door morning training seminar in the House building could be heard in a nearby hallway, making the whole thing smack more of a fifth-grade sex education class than a stern corporate lesson in appropriate office conduct.

Lawmakers sat through a Power Point presentation advising that the Maryland General Assembly, in an effort to comply with state and federal laws, will not tolerate sexual harassment.

For those unclear on that, specifics were offered: "Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitutes sexual harassment when submission to or rejection of this conduct explicitly or implicitly affects an individual's employment. ... "

"What does unwelcome mean?" the Power Point asks and then plainly clarifies:

"`Sexual touching' is almost always ruled unwelcome."

"Repeated requests for dates: `No' means `no.'"

Some members appeared miffed by that latter point.

"The prevailing concern among members in the room was if they were never allowed to ask someone for a date twice, most of us would be single for a lifetime," said freshman Del. Steve Schuh, an Anne Arundel County Republican.

Sadly for Schuh's colleagues, persistence isn't always smiled upon - especially if it's directed at the pretty 20-something brunette who answers the front-office phones. Whistling, leering, sexual jokes, brushing against someone's body, commenting about that someone's body and displaying sexually suggestive pictures - or objects - are also discouraged.

Lawmakers said after the seminar that as part of the discussion they were asked to respond to a 15-question self test, which explored the possible pitfalls of placing the Sports Illustrated swimsuit issue on the office coffee table or the appropriateness of a male legislator asking a female committee assistant to wear shorter skirts.

Is it OK, the questionnaire asks, for a male legislator to tell a female colleague she looks nice? What about tight bear hugs? Sending flowers?

And then there was the gray-area situation that seems not so gray. "A male committee chair tells a new female legislator that she is uptight" and needs to have sex. OK, lawmakers, talk among yourselves.

"It's definitely a no-brainer," said Del. Jeannie Haddaway, an Easton Republican who attended yesterday's seminar. "I would hope that everyone here in Annapolis would know that's a big no-no."

But in Annapolis, where as much business is conducted in the back rooms of bars and hotels as in the marble corridors of the State House, not everyone is totally up to speed.

Del. Kevin Kelly, an Allegany County Democrat, does not subscribe to Sports Illustrated, and so he does not receive the swimsuit issue at work. But if he did, and if it arrived with his Newsweek subscription, Kelly said, he would happily display the magazines together. After all, the swimsuit issue is part of the subscription.

"Am I supposed to censor that and say, no, I'm going to take that one out?" he said.  
"I totally disagree with that."

Kelly is signed up for today's session.

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