

# What if Maryland had a progressive governor?

Larry Ottinger

“For all sad words of tongue and pen,” wrote John Greenleaf Whittier, “The saddest are these ‘It might have been.’”

As the sun sets on the 2018 [General Assembly](#) session, Marylanders who care about the future of our state — about our economic security, physical safety, environmental health and quality of our kids’ education — the question of “what might have been” is especially troubling.

For all the conventional wisdom about Gov. [Larry Hogan](#)’s moderate tendencies, his actions this session and throughout his time in public life tell a different story. They raise a fundamental question: What might have been were our state to be led by a bold, progressive governor?

Instead of being governed by a [Koch-funded](#) Republican who [campaigned for Chris Christie](#) (after the Bridgegate scandal), [posed for photo-ops](#) with Betsy DeVos, and referred to Maryland’s educators as “[thugs](#),” we could have had a governor who was truly willing to stand up to the Trump administration.

A significant part of this legislative session was spent trying to fix the health care and tax mess, along with other problems caused by the Trump administration and the Republican-led Congress — national issues Mr. Hogan weakly dodged saying it [wasn’t “his job”](#) to address them. Well, federal actions have a tremendous impact on the lives of Marylanders.

Rather than Governor Hogan’s empty platitudes and [corporate tax giveaways](#), we could have made real progress toward: a strong business climate, a high road economy, elite public schools, solid transportation options, a highly-skilled workforce with access to affordable higher-education and skills

training and with livable wages and benefits, safe and affordable housing and neighborhoods, and a climate of entrepreneurship fueled by support for Maryland as national leader on clean energy and innovation jobs.

Instead of debating whether to adequately fund Maryland's cash-strapped public schools, allowing Baltimore's school children to shiver in freezing classrooms or watching the governor and General Assembly treat school construction funding as a political football, we could have worked together to replace temporary learning trailers with state-of-the-art, 21<sup>st</sup> century modern classrooms that would have been not only the envy of the nation, but the world.

Furthermore, rather than pushing sham proposals that undermine the quality of our schools and the pay of our educators — [like vouchers](#) — we could have had leadership doing the serious work to get our schools back to their [prior perch as No. 1](#) in the nation.

In place of demagoguery and delay from a governor with an [A-minus rating](#) from the NRA, we could have gotten serious about preventing the next Great Mills shooting.

Instead of race-baiting and ignoring the real needs of Baltimore, we could have had leadership committed to [supporting the important work](#) of the Black Lives Matter movement, accepting [Syrian refugees](#), and providing a [sanctuary](#) from Trump administration anti-immigrant policies and rhetoric. Instead of [refusing to sign](#) protections for LGBTQ rights, we could have had a governor who actually cared about equal opportunity for all.

Imagine if we had a leader in Government House who scored better than [“needs improvement”](#) on the League of Conservation Voters' report card. A governor who didn't [veto renewable energy standards](#) and cozy up to big energy companies to build a fracked gas pipeline but instead stood with all of us in support of cleaner air, water and jobs?

Imagine if we had a governor who didn't [veto paid leave](#) for workers too sick to come to work but instead worked to prevent more Marylanders from getting sick in the first place by expanding access to quality, affordable health care and taking action to drive down the skyrocketing cost of care.

While there was some good news out of our session, much achieved by overriding the governor's vetoes or without his signature (like expanding access to voting), the opportunity cost of what we did *not* do is far greater. The tragedy of what might have been threatens to undermine the quality of the air we breathe, the size our families' paychecks and future of our children's dreams.

Here is hoping that in the next legislative session, Marylanders will not have to settle for less. The future of our great state and nation cannot afford it.

*Larry Ottinger ([lsottinger@gmail.com](mailto:lsottinger@gmail.com)) is chairman of the board of the non-profit Our Maryland.*