

## Leggett budgets \$50k for inauguration costs

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Montgomery County Executive Ike Leggett faces no serious challenges in his November re-election bid. (Greg Whitesell/Examiner file)

Montgomery County Executive Ike Leggett is proposing to set aside \$50,000 of taxpayer money to celebrate his own likely re-election as the county struggles to close a nearly \$800 million budget gap.

Leggett's proposed budget includes the \$50,000 for an inauguration ceremony and to help ensure a "smooth transition" of power for the county's elected officials.

But it's unlikely that the money would be used to fete anyone other than Leggett, as no serious challengers have announced their intention to run against him in November. All County Council members are also up for re-election; incumbents tend to win the vast majority of elections.

Union officials, who are warring with Leggett over his proposed cuts in pay and staffing levels, said the inauguration fund was "just ridiculous" given the county's

finances. The county is looking at cutting bus routes, chopping 450 positions and increasing the number of students per classroom.

"I don't think taxpayers are concerned about celebrating his re-election," said Gino Renne, president of the Municipal and County Government Employees Organization.

"His priorities seem to be more about himself than others," said Walt Bader, chief negotiator for the Fraternal Order of Police union. Bader also has been critical of Leggett's need for a team of bodyguards who average \$90,000 a year in salary and benefits.

Renne said that if Leggett were "hell-bent" on having an inauguration ceremony, he should seek funding from the private sector as other elected officials typically do.

County budget staff did not provide a breakdown for how the \$50,000 would be spent, but said the fund typically isn't completely used and the leftover money is often used for other county services. Leggett's spokesman, Patrick Lacefield, noted that the inauguration budget is half of what it was four years ago, and said the county will look at ways to bring the number down further.

"If there's a way that we can do it for less or for nothing, we'll be exploring it," Lacefield said.

Leggett's 2006 inauguration, which marked the first change in county leadership after 12 years of Doug Duncan at the helm, was held at the Strathmore Music Hall in Kensington before a reported crowd of 1,400.

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