

TAKING EXCEPTION

Proposed Lockheed Martin grant is cause for concern

The April 20 editorial "What's good for Lockheed . . ." chastised members of the Montgomery County Council for questioning County Executive Isiah Leggett's request for a \$900,000 grant to Lockheed Martin.

While our council has yet to vote on the issue, the proposed grant, which would cover two years of county lodging taxes at the firm's conference and training center, including a retroactive rebate, raises legitimate concerns.

First, council attorneys have concluded that there is no legal basis for exempting the center from the lodging tax. In 2010, when Mr. Leggett proposed legislation to do so, the proposal had so little support that it was never even considered. The council's rejection was guided by a number of concerns: Lockheed Martin built its conference center well aware of the tax; the center competed with other hotels that paid the tax; and our scarce resources were needed in

other areas.

Two years later, the county executive has proposed a different approach — an economic development grant — that raises other, equally challenging issues. The purpose of such grants is to provide incentives for a company to locate or expand in the county prospectively, not retroactively. Moreover, the council has received public testimony that Lockheed Martin charges hundreds of dollars a night to non-employees who stay at the center, which, if accurate, undermines the core argument that the facility is for its staff only.

The council values Lockheed Martin's role in our community. We regret that, without any changed circumstance or consultation, the executive has created this unnecessary controversy.

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