

= Isiah Leggett =

Isiah " Ike " Leggett (born July 25 , 1944) is an American politician from the U.S. state of Maryland , currently serving as the executive of Montgomery County , Maryland . He is a member of the Democratic Party .

Born in Deweyville , Texas , Leggett attended Southern University in Baton Rouge , Louisiana and , after serving in the Vietnam War with the U.S. Army , earned a law degree from Howard University in Washington , D.C. In 1986 , he became the first African @-@ American elected to the county council in Montgomery County , Maryland and served on the council through 2002 . He remains the only African @-@ American ever elected to that body at @-@ large .

For two years , Leggett served as the chairman of the Maryland Democratic Party before leaving that position to run for office once again . Leggett was elected County Executive of Montgomery County in 2006 , the first African @-@ American to hold that office . Since taking office , Leggett has worked to put the County ' s fiscal house in order while strengthening critical County services in education and public safety , and helping the most vulnerable . In the four years before Leggett took office , County spending grew by over 40 percent .

In his first five years in office , Montgomery County ' s spending was held to zero percent . Responding to the worldwide recession that hit in 2008 , Leggett closed budget gaps of over \$ 2 @. @ 6 billion , eliminating 10 percent of County government positions , while imposing furloughs (including himself) , wage freezes , and changes in retirement and health benefits to save the County money . At the same time , Leggett put tens of millions of dollars into building and preserving thousands of units of affordable housing in the County , establishing a CountyStat office to ensure ? real time ? performance of County services , and set up a multi @-@ agency Positive Youth Development Initiative to ensure positive programs for at @-@ risk youth .

Leggett worked to strengthen Montgomery County ' s biotechnology and life sciences sectors and also established the " 311 " Customer Service as a single point of entry via phone and the internet for residents seeking County services . During Leggett ' s first eight years , serious crime went down in the County by 24 percent and the Fire and Rescue Service ' s response times to Montgomery County ' s fires improved dramatically . Leggett was reelected to a second term in 2010 and to a third four @-@ year term in 2014 .

= = Early life and education = =

Leggett was born on July 25 , 1944 in Deweyville , Texas and grew up with twelve siblings in Alexandria , Louisiana . In Alexandria , he played football for Peabody Magnet High School . He attended Southern University in Baton Rouge , working through school as a groundskeeper in a work @-@ study program and graduating in 1967 . In his time as an undergraduate , he was a student leader in the civil rights movement and twice met Dr. Martin Luther King , Jr . He led the on @-@ campus civil rights movement while at the same time commanding the Southern University Reserve Officers ' Training Corps (ROTC) unit . He was elected president of his class during his senior year and is a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity , the first intercollegiate fraternity established for African @-@ Americans . In 1968 , Leggett served as a captain in the United States Army during the Vietnam War , first in combat with a Military Advisory Unit attached to the Army of the Republic of Vietnam and then as a public affairs officer with the 7th Support Battalion / 199th Light Infantry Brigade . He was awarded the Bronze Star for Service . In 1974 , he received Master of Arts and Juris Doctor degrees from Howard University in Washington , D.C. , graduating first in his law school class , followed soon after by a Master of Laws degree from George Washington University . He returned to Howard as a professor in their law school in 1976 , and continued teaching at the law school through his election as County Executive in 2006 , with the exception of a stint as a White House Fellow under President Jimmy Carter in 1977 . Leggett is currently married to his second wife , Catherine .

= = Career = =

Leggett's first participation in county government was as an appointed member of the Montgomery County Human Relations Committee, on which he served from 1979 to 1986. He was later named Chair of the Committee. In 1986, he was elected as an at-large member of the Montgomery County Council, becoming the first African American ever to serve on the council. To this day, he is the only African American ever elected to county office at large. He was re-elected to the seat three more times, and served three one-year terms as council president. During his time on the council, he chaired the council's transportation and environment committee and played a role in passage of a county living wage law and a public smoking ban. In 1992, a former county council aide of Leggett's accused him of sexual harassment in a widely publicized case, but the accusation was dismissed by a jury. In 2002, Leggett declined to run for re-election to the county council. He was widely viewed as a potential running mate for Democratic nominee Kathleen Kennedy Townsend in that year's gubernatorial race. However, Townsend chose Admiral Charles R. Larson instead. Townsend and Larson lost in November when Maryland elected Robert Ehrlich to be its first Republican governor in 40 years and Lieutenant Governor Michael S. Steele as its first African American statewide elected official. When his term on the council was completed in December of that year, Leggett was elected as chairman of the Maryland Democratic Party. Leggett's chairmanship was seen by some Democratic activists as important to maintaining the African American base of the Maryland Democratic Party and rebuilding the party's strength following the 2002 gubernatorial loss.

=== 2006 campaign for county executive ===

Following the election of 2004, Maryland politicians started announcing their intentions for the 2006 elections. Among them was three-term County Executive Doug Duncan, who was in the early stages of a run for governor. In December 2004, Leggett left his position as Chair of the Maryland Democratic Party to begin a campaign to replace Duncan as Montgomery County Executive. In the Democratic primary election Leggett squared off against a former colleague from the council, Steve Silverman. Leggett and Silverman engaged in a long series of debates beginning almost a year before the election. But despite being outspent by Silverman by more than five to one, Leggett won the Democratic nomination for executive by 61% to 35% in the primary election on September 12, 2006. He then faced Republican nominee Chuck Floyd and independent anti-tax advocate Robin Ficker in the general election. Leggett easily won the November election with 68 percent of the vote to Floyd's 22 percent and 10 percent for Ficker. He carried 239 of the County's 241 voting precincts.

=== First term as county executive ===

In the early days of his administration, Leggett took the lead on a number of controversial issues. To help alleviate transportation funding difficulties and move County transit projects forward, he proposed a statewide gas tax increase, a position he first articulated in his race for County Executive. This proposal, which happened in the midst of a state budget crunch and in response to high levels of traffic congestion in the county, was supported by the County Council but largely ignored by incoming Governor Martin O'Malley. Leggett continued to advocate for the increase throughout his term.

Leggett also solved a vexing problem involving a hiring site for day laborers from the city of Gaithersburg and the surrounding upcounty area. During the term of Leggett's predecessor Doug Duncan, Gaithersburg had struggled to find space within the city limits that the county could lease for use as a location where the day laborers could wait for employers. The owners of virtually all of the more than 30 sites considered by the city government had refused to grant a lease for this purpose, and in the one case where the property owner was willing to consider the use, the county's efforts to lease the property fell through after the property owner backed out. The debate became caught up in a larger national debate about the role of illegal immigrants in American society.

Leggett located a site for day laborer center on county @-@ owned land with his first several months in office .. Despite opposition from anti @-@ immigrant voices , the Center has served hundreds of workers and employers without incident .

During his first term Leggett reduced County spending increases to 14 percent in the year before he took office to , first , 7 percent and then 1 @.@ 6 percent in his first two years . He increased the County investment in preserving and creating affordable housing while also creating one of the nation 's most aggressive campaigns to combat and track home foreclosures . He won approval of the right of the County to have " first refusal " on properties to preserve affordable housing and established a first @-@ ever Tenants Work Group to identify and advocate for the County 's 100 @,@ 000 renters . His CountyStat project tracked County departments ' performance in real @-@ time , saving \$ 7 million in overtime pay in its first year . He also opened a 311 call center to improve access to County services by providing a single number to call .

Responding the growing national economic recession , Leggett closed budget gaps of more than \$ 1 @.@ 2 billion in his first term , eliminating hundreds of jobs and , in 2008 , increasing property taxes beyond the County Charter limit . His 11 @-@ point economic package sought to help County businesses hit by the recession by easing regulatory burdens . He launched his Smart Growth Initiative , a bold program to leverage and swap County @-@ owned properties to update County facilities while opening up economic development and transit @-@ oriented housing around the Shady Grove Metro and in the heart of the County 's biotech industry . Leggett also put down blueprints for the future with biotechnology and green business task forces . Other business expansion was pursued in County missions to Israel , India , Korea , and China .

Leggett also held the County 's first " Senior Summit " to focus attention on the County 's growing older population , expanded County recycling programs to the broadest in the region , and won approval of a new Fillmore music and entertainment center in Silver Spring . A broad program of code enforcement reforms sought to limit commercial incursions into the County 's residential neighborhoods and a first @-@ ever " road inventory " evaluated tens of thousands of miles of County roads . He established a County Veterans Commission to reach out to the estimated 50 @,@ 000 veterans and their families and worked closely with the State , the federal government , and surrounding neighborhoods to deal with the impact of the consolidation of Walter Reed Medical Center into the Bethesda Naval Hospital as called for under the Base Realignment & Closure Commission . Under Leggett 's leadership the County responded aggressively to the outbreak of the H1N1 virus in 2009 .

When the County 's traffic management computer went down for 36 hours in November 2009 , snarling traffic throughout the County , Leggett advanced needed funding for a new system . During his first term , he sought and won Council approval for an Emergency Medical Services transport fee that would allow the County Fire & Rescue Service to bill insurance companies for the cost of ambulance transports at no cost to County residents . Leggett argued it would earn the County up to \$ 15 million more annually to devote to Fire & Rescue . County volunteer fire departments took the measure to voter referendum in November 2010 and overturned the law with 53 percent in favor of repeal in a bitter campaign that pitted Leggett and career County firefighters versus volunteers .

= = = Second term as county executive = = =

Leggett was unopposed in the 2010 Democratic Party primary for County Executive . In the general election , he was opposed by Republican Party candidate Douglas Rosenfeld . In the November balloting , Leggett won reelection with 66 percent of the vote to 34 percent for Rosenfeld , carrying 227 of the County 's 252 precincts .

Leggett began his second term with the County still deeply in the shadow of the Great Recession . He continued to hold down County spending and County government employment while his fiscal stewardship helped the County maintain its AAA bond rating , despite federal cutbacks and sequestration . He continued to give priority to education , public safety and help for the County 's most vulnerable .

Among his initiatives was the formation of a blue @-@ ribbon Pepco Work Group to critique the

utility 's performance shortfalls during summer and winter storms and suggest improvements . The 400 @-@ page report supported efforts by the Maryland Public Service Commission to require greater infrastructure , emergency response , and communication capabilities . Leggett and the County also fought a series of Pepco rate requests , helping to limit increases for consumers . Responding to the upsurge in need with the recession , Leggett 's Health & Human Services department established three new Neighborhood Opportunity Centers to reach out to at @-@ risk families in County neighborhoods . Leggett boosted the number of police assigned to County schools , but failed in his 2011 effort to protect children and youth with an overnight youth curfew , with the County Council not allowing the proposal to come to a vote .

Following an increase in the State gas tax , for which Leggett was a longtime advocate , Leggett won more than \$ 1 billion in State funding for County transportation projects . He also led an effort , working with Prince George 's and Baltimore counties to establish a new County / State matching fund program to boost school construction to meet rising demand . He opened five new fire stations in his first eight years , compared with only three opened in the 12 years before he took office . He won Council approval once more for an Emergency Medical Services transport fee and , after securing support from volunteer fire companies who defeated it in the 2010 referendum , the program went into effect . Leggett supported an increase in Montgomery County 's minimum wage to \$ 11 @. @ 50 an hour in 2013 . Between 2010 and 2014 Montgomery County outperformed neighboring Fairfax County and the District of Columbia in job growth .

In 2011 , Montgomery County leased farmland owned by the public school system in Potomac in order to build soccer fields to meet a critical shortfall in such fields in the Down County area . This public / private partnership was challenged by residents of the Brickyard Road neighborhood , who earlier had opposed affordable housing on the site and now opposed the public / private partnership Leggett advanced to build and maintain the fields . In 2013 the County abandoned the effort and returned the land to the school system .

In 2013 Leggett was elected president of the County Executives of America . In spring of that year , he unveiled a joint County / State / Federal effort to build the Cybersecurity Center for Excellence in Gaithersburg. which he said would establish Montgomery County as a national center for civilian cybersecurity work . In 2013 , Leggett visited China to advance economic development cooperation and established a " Sister City " relationship with the city of Xi 'an . A similar business development trip in 2014 to India included visits to high @-@ tech firms , embracing Hyderabad as a Sister City , and included a visit on the way back to Taiwan .

Over Leggett 's first eight years , County taxes as a percentage of County residents ' income went down by 10 percent .

= = = Third term as county executive = = =

Leggett easily won the Democratic nomination for a third term , gaining 45 percent of the vote to 33 percent for former county executive Doug Duncan and 22 percent for councilmember Phil Andrews , and winning 80 percent of county precincts . In the fall general election Leggett defeated the Republican candidate James Shalleck by 65 @-@ 35 percent , winning 212 of 245 voting precincts .

In his inaugural address , Leggett outlined a Six @-@ Point Economic Plan designed to encourage investment and job growth in the county , touching on filling vacant office space , boosting start @-@ up tech ventures , guaranteeing a 30 @-@ day turn @-@ around time for permitting of ready new projects and development , improving work @-@ force development , and introducing a new , high @-@ speed fiber network . The proposal also included the development of an Independent Transit Authority to expand transportation options , enhance job growth from planned projects and grow the County 's tax base .

Leggett was elected as president of the Maryland Association of Counties in January 2015 .