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Reporter's Notebook: At computer tax celebration, lobbyists over lawmakers

Alan Brody

The elected officials who attended the Maryland Computer Services Association's victory celebration on a tax repeal in Baltimore on Monday took a back seat to a group of folks not used to receiving top billing.

"This is the first party I've been to where they bring up the lobbyists for a bow before the legislators," said Gov. Martin O'Malley, when he got his turn at the microphone after some 20 minutes of introductions. "So to my fellow elected officials, I guess they're trying to tell us something."

It's probably the first time that Bob Enten, Tim Perry, Lisa Harris Jones and Kevin O'Keeffe have received such a rousing applause as hired guns.

Either it shows the techies are still learning the protocol ropes or it proves who really pushes the buttons in Annapolis.

At the same party, the GOP was MIA.

Republicans howled almost as soon as the General Assembly passed the computer services sales tax and members introduced bills for repeal.

At the party, Ron George was the only GOP lawmaker in the house.

What gives?

"Unfortunately, I think people only look at that last bill and forget that it was really Republicans who put the pressure on to repeal that tax," George said.

What of the nearly dozen Democrats who received applause at the victory party on Monday?

"It amazes me to see people here who votes for that last bill ... as if they voted for a repeal after they were the ones who fought for a tax in the first place," he said.

Event organizers didn't hold back praise of O'Malley, who initially balked at a repeal before coming around in March. "I think they're trying to show respect to the governor, but it kind of hurts," George added.