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HEADLINE: Shore Senators Offer a Way Out of Md.

BYLINE: Lisa Frazier, Washington Post Staff Writer

BODY:

Outnumbered in the state legislature and besieged by what they consider intrusive Annapolis bureaucrats, several Eastern Shore legislators have their own idea for how to improve their status in Maryland politics: secession.

A bill filed this week by Sen. Richard Colburn (R-Dorchester) calls for a referendum this fall in nine Eastern Shore counties on whether to secede from the rest of the state. If the voters were to say yes, Colburn said, he would encourage legislators on the eastern shores of Delaware and Virginia to join him in his quest to create a new state.

He's already fixed on a possible name: Delmarva.

"We live work and play on the Eastern Shore, and we think we should have a say in controlling our own destiny," Colburn said. "It shouldn't be controlled by the Annapolis bureaucracy."

Asked if he's serious, Colburn whips out several slips of paper with handwritten notes detailing his reasons. "This is something I've thought about all my life," he says, without cracking a smile. "I'm dead serious."

In a nutshell, Colburn said, the Eastern Shore is overregulated by state agencies and has long been picked on by those who turn their noses up at the area's mostly rural way of life. Once, Colburn noted, former governor William Donald Schaefer even referred to the region as "the outhouse" of the state.

But "the straw that broke the camel's back," Colburn said, was recent legislation proposed by Gov. Parris N. Glendening (D) to tighten controls on farmers in an effort to curb *Pfiesteria piscicida*, a toxic microbe that killed fish and made people ill along the Eastern Shore last year. Eastern Shore politicians say the bill could ruin the region's economy.

Ray Feldmann, a Glendening spokesman, said the governor is focused on legislative issues that really matter to people. "Secession is not one of them," Feldmann said.

Proposals for Eastern Shore secession have surfaced periodically in Maryland politics. Even if voters there agreed

to secede from the state, such action would still require the consent of both the General Assembly and the U.S. Congress, according to Assistant State Attorney General Richard Israel. For example, the Massachusetts legislature agreed to allow what is now known as Maine to secede in 1819, and Congress accepted it as a state the following year.

The proposed Maryland legislation, Senate Bill 564, has been assigned to the Senate's Economic and Environmental Affairs Committee, of which the bill's co-sponsor, Sen. J. Lowell Stoltzfus (R-Somerset), is a member. Stoltzfus said his main objective is to send a message to his fellow legislators, including "a few slick Montgomery County lawyers who insist on telling us how to farm."

"I can't imagine myself being so arrogant that I can tell Montgomery County how to deal with their problems," Stoltzfus said. "Yet some of these people have proposed legislation that could cause economic devastation to our community."

Stoltzfus declined to give names, but he insisted: "They know who they are."

Sen. Brian E. Frosh, a Montgomery County lawyer and a leading environmentalist, called the bill amusing. He said his Eastern Shore colleagues are just as guilty of trying to impose their will on the state. For example, Frosh said, Colburn has proposed a "fruit defamation law" that would make it illegal to criticize fruit too harshly. "He wants to put a stop to people saying their tomatoes don't taste good, and he thinks we're imposing on him," Frosh said.

Colburn's proposal elicited some mild expressions of interest in neighboring states. Delaware Rep. Clifford G. "Biff" Lee said he can relate to the neglect felt by his Eastern Shore colleagues in Maryland. "Well, jokingly, we've talked about it quite a bit," Lee said. "It seems they've got the same troubles we do."

On a more serious note, Lee said of the proposal: "If the people in my district tell me they want me to take a serious look at it, if I want to keep my job, I have to take a serious look at it."

Virginia's Eastern Shore residents feel forgotten by the rest of the state sometimes, said Del. Robert S. Bloxom (R-Accomack), but they're pretty attached to the old commonwealth. "I'm not real sure that Virginia citizens would be willing to break the Virginia tradition," he said.

GRAPHIC: Photo, ap/john gillis, Legislation to limit runoff from farms draws protesters Marge and Lambert Cissel of Woodbine, Md., and produce farmer Albert Schulze, right, of Poplar Springs.

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