



BY LARRY MORRIS—THE WASHINGTON POST

Richard N. Dixon, left, Maryland's treasurer since 1996, discusses his resignation at a news conference with Senate Majority Leader Clarence W. Blount (D-Baltimore) and Sen. Nathaniel J. McFadden (D-Baltimore).

Md. Treasurer to Step Down

Dixon's Health Forces Move; Democrats Eye Successor

By DANIEL LEDUC
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Maryland State Treasurer Richard N. Dixon unexpectedly announced his resignation yesterday, potentially creating a series of opportunities—or predicaments—for state politicians early in a crucial election year.

Dixon, 63, is the first African American to serve in the job. The Democrat's term ends next January, but Dixon said worsening diabetes, which has caused him to lose sight in one eye and to walk with a cane after the amputation of a toe, led him to step down effective Feb. 1.

The treasurer is selected by the General Assembly,

which is in session through April 8. Dixon said he wanted to give legislators time to name a successor without having to return for a special session.

"You do reach a point sometimes when you realize you can't do a job in a way you're accustomed to doing it," he said.

Dixon became treasurer in 1996. During his tenure, state investment proceeds soared because of stock market gains in the late 1990s. But the state pension fund took a dive in the past year because of stock losses. While Dixon was criticized for the losses, the pension fund is nearly 20 years ahead of schedule in being fully funded.

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Md. Treasurer Resigns In Face of Health Woes

DIXON, *From B1*

His sudden retirement set off speculation about who might replace him, with Del. Nancy K. Kopp (D-Montgomery) emerging as an early favorite of some legislators.

The treasurer's post does not have a high public profile but is considered a political plum. Paid \$100,000 annually, the treasurer oversees billions of dollars in state investments and, perhaps most important, is one of three members of the Board of Public Works.

That board, which includes the governor and comptroller, wields enormous power because it approves all state contracts, major purchases and local school aid. In recent months, with Comptroller William Donald Schaefer (D) feuding with Gov. Parris N. Glendening (D), it has been Dixon's swing vote that has allowed many of the governor's projects to proceed.

The legislature will seek applicants for the job. Because there are three times as many delegates as there are senators, the House has control over the selection.

House Speaker Casper R. Taylor Jr. (D-Allegany) said he hopes that whoever is selected to fill out Dixon's term will continue in the job for some time, but the candidate will face another election next January once a new legislature has been seated. "Whoever we bless has no guarantees" that they'll win again, he said.

Taylor himself has long been rumored to be interested in the job. In recent months, he has also expressed interest in being selected as Lt. Gov. Kathleen Kennedy Townsend's running mate in her gubernatorial campaign this year.

Dixon's retirement forced Taylor to make a decision about his interest in the treasurer's job, and yesterday he said he was not a candidate. If Townsend doesn't select him to run with her, Taylor will almost certainly be reelected speaker next year.

Should Taylor remain speaker,

several other delegates, such as Economic Matters Committee Chairman Michael E. Busch (D-Anne Arundel) and Environmental Matters Committee Chairman John A. Hurson (D-Montgomery), who are eager to move up in the legislative leadership, will have to put their ambitions on hold.

Black legislators may want to promote an African American candidate for treasurer, but Del. Howard P. Rawlings (D-Baltimore), chairman of the Appropriations Committee and one of the most influential black leaders in the State House, said that was unlikely.

"African American legislators would love to find a black replacement, but the pool is small," Rawlings said.

He said Kopp would be a good choice for the job because she is one of the most respected fiscal experts in the house. In addition, Rawlings said, Kopp would offer geographic political balance to the Board of Public Works because she is from Montgomery County. Schaefer is from Baltimore, as are, Rawlings noted, the leading candidates for governor.

Other possibilities would be Senate Budget and Taxation Committee Chairman Barbara A. Hoffman (D-Baltimore) and Sen. Robert R. Neall (D-Anne Arundel), who also is one of the leading budget experts in the General Assembly.

House Democrats met for a closed-door caucus yesterday to learn about selecting Dixon's successor, but no one volunteered candidates during the session, said lawmakers who attended.

Dixon, a former House delegate from Carroll County, was a stockbroker in Baltimore before becoming treasurer.

"He has been a friend, a professional and a pioneer who has made great contributions to his community and the entire state," Glendening said. "Throughout his career he has broken down barriers, earning recognition for both his performance and leadership."