



57 of 166 DOCUMENTS

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The Washington Post

February 23, 1989, Thursday, Final Edition

SECTION: METRO; PAGE D1

LENGTH: 784 words

HEADLINE: Md. House Deals Schaefer 2 Setbacks;
Committees Kill Bills on Funds for the Disabled, State School Board

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DATELINE: ANNAPOLIS, Feb. 22, 1989

BODY:

Maryland Gov. William Donald Schaefer was handed two painful legislative setbacks today by the House of Delegates in moves that his lieutenants said seemed choreographed to "send some type of message."

A House committee voted unanimously this afternoon to kill Schaefer's controversial proposal to charge parents of developmentally disabled adults a portion of the cost of their care, while another committee rejected the governor's bid to gain more control over the state's Board of Education.

The defeats of two key Schaefer initiatives came as the General Assembly neared the midpoint of its 90-day session, and administration officials said the actions caught them by surprise. "It looks like a message was being delivered," said Lt. Gov. Melvin A. Steinberg. He said he had thought the legislature was nearing a compromise on both bills, which had emerged as prized, though controversial, programs.

Most emotionally charged was the proposal to charge parents of developmentally disabled adults up to 15 percent of their pre-tax income for services now provided by the state. Groups representing the mentally retarded were outraged; protesters packed two legislative hearings on the issue, booing Steinberg and buttonholing their legislators. Former secretary of state Lorraine M. Sheehan called the proposal "divisive, discriminatory and a personal insult to anyone with a handicap, mental or physical."

The House Ways and Means Committee was only slightly less critical in its 18-to-0 rejection of the Schaefer plan. "We didn't think the bill, or any of the recommendations, are acceptable," said Del. Dennis Donaldson (D-Prince George's). "It's not that complicated."

Schaefer said his plan for the care of the developmentally disabled would have created a "partnership" with parents and allowed the state to help the 4,900 disabled adults on a waiting list for services.

Steinberg acknowledged that the proposed fees were excessive, but said advocacy groups in recent days had

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expressed a willingness to compromise. Steinberg said repeatedly that the administration was most concerned about the "concept" that those who could afford to pay for services should do so.

The committee disagreed. A Ways and Means report said there were no grounds for compromise between the administration and advocacy groups, and blamed the administration's secrecy and lack of research about practices in other states for the standoff.

Donaldson said the small amount of money raised by the new fees -- less than \$ 4 million once cuts proposed by Steinberg were taken into account -- meant the project was not worth the pain.

"I knew when we saw so many people turn out that the bill did not have much of a chance," Sheehan said after the vote. "People literally came out of the woodwork. This really hit home."

The Constitutional and Administrative Law Committee voted 11 to 9 to kill a bill that would have given the governor the power to choose the president of the state Board of Education.

Del. Anne S. Perkins (D-Baltimore), who heads the committee, said the majority believed in the importance of "keeping politics out of education." The board sets broad policies for the 650,000 children in Maryland public schools. The bill, which Schaefer had pushed as a tool to improve management of education, would have removed the board's ability to pick its own leader, added four members to the nine-member body and shortened the terms of office from five years to four. If approved, it would have given Schaefer more control over state education than most other governors in the nation, according to education experts.

Perkins said she expected the governor to be upset. Schaefer is known for bursts of tempers at what he sees as legislative intrusions into his authority, and the past two General Assemblies have been marked by turf battles between his administration and legislative leaders.

Perkins stressed that the bill was given careful consideration because of Schaefer and what she called his sincere interest in improving education in Maryland. "Had this been any other governor, the bill would have gone down with far less debate and far more quickly," she said.

Perkins said that the governor already appoints all nine members of the board, which gives him considerable say in who is elected president. Schaefer has had some run-ins with Board of Education, and was specifically miffed over its hiring of a new state school superintendent.

The current president of the board, Lawrence A. Shulman, has said he will not seek reappointment to the board when his term expires this year.

Staff writers Jo-Ann Armao, John Lancaster and Howard Schneider contributed to this report.