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HEADLINE: Schaefer ships off to Kuwait leaving state woes behind him

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ANNAPOLIS - Legislators are angry that Gov. William Donald Schaefer is leaving today for a tour of recently liberated Kuwait while Maryland remains in the throes of financial turmoil.

One day after he ordered that benefits be cut for 98,000 state welfare recipients, Mr. Schaefer announced he would jet to the Middle East at the invitation of Kuwaiti Ambassador Saud Nasir Sabah.

Mr. Schaefer was the only governor in the nation asked to join diplomats, congressmen and business leaders on the inaugural "Freedom Flight to Kuwait."

Administration officials said there have been no promises of state aid to the Kuwaitis. But word of the trip prompted a cool reception from lawmakers working to pull the state out of its fiscal morass.

"It's an honor for the state, of course," said House Majority Whip Nancy Kopp, Montgomery County Democrat. "But the timing of the welfare cuts and flying off to Kuwait creates a perception of insensitivity to the people of Maryland."

House Speaker R. Clayton Mitchell Jr. said the governor's attention should be focused on home-front problems, such as resolving the current year's deficit of more than \$500 million.

"He can't find enough money to feed the poor here, but he's going to go over there [and offer his help]," said Mr. Mitchell, a Kent County Democrat.

But Schaefer press secretary Paul Schurick defended the governor's decision to take the five-day tour of the

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war-ravaged nation, saying it is likely to help Maryland businesses gain new trade opportunities.

"There is potential here to help the state for the next 10 to 20 years," he said.

A month ago, Mr. Schaefer gained an audience with the Kuwaiti ambassador and offered state resources in the rebuilding of the Persian Gulf emirate. That offer of medical and other humanitarian aid apparently led to the governor's invitation to visit the oil-rich nation.

The governor also has said he would reserve space at Baltimore-Washington International Airport and the port of Baltimore to ship supplies to Kuwait.

The meeting with the Kuwaiti ambassador went far better than Mr. Schaefer's last foray into international affairs when, after a trip to Eastern Europe, he told Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger he would like to help the effort to democratize those nations.

Mr. Eagleburger rejected the offer outright.

"The people of Kuwait have suffered tremendous destruction and loss, both personally and to their country's economic resources. The people of Maryland share in their losses and stand ready to help them," Mr. Schaefer said in a prepared release.

The governor refused to discuss the trip with reporters yesterday.

Mr. Schaefer will be accompanied by Economic and Employment Development Secretary J. Randall Evans.

They join a party replete with notables such as former secretaries of state Henry Kissinger and Alexander Haig, Secretary of Commerce Robert Mosbacher and former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Jeane Kirkpatrick.

The chief executive officers of 20 major corporations also will make the trip. Only one of those, Joshua Smith of Prince George's County's Maxima Corp., represents a Maryland business.