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The Washington Times

February 14, 1990, Wednesday, Final Edition

**SECTION:** Part C; MONEY; Pg. C3

**LENGTH:** 461 words

**HEADLINE:** Schaefer to seek business in East bloc

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**DATELINE:** ANNAPOLIS

**BODY:**

Maryland Gov. William Donald Schaefer, who called Russian leaders "rattlesnakes" three years ago, will return to the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe this spring at the head of a state trade delegation.

Mr. Schaefer released plans yesterday for a trip that will take business leaders and state officials to Austria, Poland, Hungary and the Soviet Union in May to discuss trade and educational exchanges. Trade officials said they may also stop in Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia if conditions there allow it.

Mr. Schaefer said that the Soviet bloc has changed drastically since his last trip there in 1987, and that Maryland needs to take advantage of the changes.

"This is a very important time in the history of Eastern Europe," he said. "We want Maryland business leaders to be part of the changes in that part of the world."

The main point of the trip will be to promote the Port of Baltimore. State officials will visit Eastern European ports and meet with foreign merchant marine ministries.

The entourage will include Maryland agriculture, transportation and economic development officials, representatives of the University of Maryland and a delegation of private businessmen, which is still being assembled.

"We don't think we're going too soon. We think we're going at the right time," Mr. Schaefer said. "We won't be the first delegation there."

Reminded of the rattlesnake remark, Mr. Schaefer admitted that he "didn't like Russia when I went last time because there was no freedom." But he said changes since his last visit have resulted in what should be a drastically different Soviet Union.

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"It all depends on the snake you're dealing with," Mr. Schaefer said. "I recently had my picture taken with a big snake. When I looked that snake in the eye and he didn't try to squeeze me to death, I began to like the snake."

The trade mission will be Mr. Schaefer's sixth since he took office in 1987. Officials with the Department of Economic and Employment Development said yesterday that a 1989 trip to Western Europe brought \$31 million in business investment to the state, and a 1988 trip to Canada brought promises of \$12 million in sales for Maryland companies.

A trip to the Middle East last fall resulted in agricultural and educational exchanges and a number of business leads, officials said. A 1987 trip to Japan and the Far East also brought potential business leads, they said.

Lt. Gov. Melvin Steinberg said expanded trade will help Maryland businesses wean themselves from defense contracts.

"If we don't get a niche in another market and plant the seeds now, by the time those [defense] contracts give out it would have a tremendous adverse economic impact on the state," Mr. Steinberg said.

**GRAPHIC:** Photo, Gov. William Donald Schaefer