

HARRY HUGHES

Governor of Maryland

Harry Roe Hughes was inaugurated on January 17, 1979, as the fifty-seventh Governor of the State of Maryland. In the general election of 1978 he received the largest majority of the vote recorded by a Maryland gubernatorial candidate in this century. He swept the State, carrying by substantial majorities Baltimore City and all but two of the twenty-three Maryland counties.

Governor Hughes came to the office of Chief Executive with sixteen years of experience as a legislator, and six years as a cabinet officer directing one of the State's largest and most complex agencies—the Department of Transportation. He also served as chairman of the Democratic Party in 1969 and 1970.

During his first two years as Governor, Hughes, working closely with the General Assembly, achieved numerous reforms. The 1979 session of the General Assembly was especially noteworthy for the broad scope of tax relief programs proposed by the new Administration and enacted by the Legislature. Some \$144 million in tax relief were provided. The measures included an increase in standard deduction rates and limits, which especially benefited those of low and moderate income. Other relief was the elimination of the sales tax on residential fuels and utilities, expansion of the homeowners tax credit program to persons under 60, and the establishment of a new tax credit program for elderly and disabled persons who rent their homes. The sales tax on the purchase of manufacturing and farm machinery was also eliminated.

State aid to Baltimore City and the twenty-three counties saw a net increase of \$94 million, a move designed to ease growing pressures on local property tax rates. Reforms were made in the property assessment procedure to make it more equitable and less disruptive to homeowners, and the State Pension System was restructured to assure its future financial integrity.

The Hughes Administration program in the 1980 session of the General Assembly addressed a number of long-standing problems faced by the State.

The Governor proposed and the Legislature enacted a package of legislation and constitutional amendments to consolidate the courts of Baltimore City, which, with voter approval, would achieve a goal pursued for more than three decades.

The consolidation of the State's environmental regulatory activities under the State Department of Health and Mental Hygiene was also achieved, resolving ten years of dispute as to how that could be accomplished. A State program for siting hazardous waste disposal facilities was created, making Maryland one of only a handful of states to enact such legislation. The Northeast Waste Disposal Authority was also created. The Authority has the potential of becoming a model in regional cooperation in the critical area of solid waste disposal, recycling, and developing new technology for converting waste to energy.

Three other areas in which the Governor placed emphasis were education, transportation, and corrections.

State aid to education, an area in which Hughes has had an enduring interest since his years as a State legislator, was increased in the 1980 session by \$68 million, an amount unprecedented in its magnitude. This massive infusion of new State funds was aimed at reducing disparities among the State subdivisions in per-pupil expenditures for basic educational programs in elementary and secondary schools. The increase in education funding included \$8 million that was targeted to the neediest jurisdictions to further enhance the equalization effect of the new State aid.

Progress was made in bolstering the State Transportation Trust Fund, which was facing a massive revenue shortfall. Some \$87 million was transferred from surplus General Funds to the Transportation Trust Fund. This interim program also provided the hard-pressed subdivisions with additional transportation funds, allowed the State to continue full funding of the Baltimore metropolitan area mass transit system, and established a stable arrangement of State support for the Washington Metro mass transit system.

From the beginning of the Hughes Administration a major effort was made toward improving management and strengthening staff in the State's correctional institutions. During the 1980 session, the Governor together with legislative leaders developed a comprehensive package for expanding and modernizing correctional facilities in the State: Construction funds were provided for two new prisons and planning funds were approved for renovations to the existing House of Corrections and the Maryland Penitentiary. The package included planning and construction funds for seven new community adult rehabilitation centers, which gave a major impetus to this community-based, innovative approach to corrections.