

# Doing the job his way

## William Donald Schaefer fills the role of state comptroller with spark

By SARA MARSH  
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**T**he first thing one notices after entering Comptroller William Donald Schaefer's office in Annapolis' Goldstein Treasury Building is that it's, well, elegant.

Gone are the dark wood paneling and the thousands of framed photos, knick-knacks and gold commemorative shovels from countless ground breakings that filled every corner of the spacious room during the 40-year tenure of the late comptroller Louis L. Goldstein.

Instead, the first-floor room now boasts a decorator look with yellow walls, white trim and a few Civil War-themed pictures. Terra cotta-colored carpeting, a matching sofa and dark wood furniture complete the decor.

As Mr. Schaefer, Maryland's former governor, completes the end of his first year back in the public spotlight, he has put his own distinctive mark on Mr. Goldstein's former inner sanctum in much the same way he has put his stamp on the office of Comptroller of the Treasury.

Since winning election as comptroller in 1998 after Mr. Goldstein's unexpected death, Mr. Schaefer, 78, has faced professional frustrations, battled with his State House successor, Gov. Parris N. Glendening, and dealt with the death of his longtime friend and companion, Hilda Mae Snoops.

Nonetheless, the former longtime Baltimore mayor has moved ahead with plans to beautify the comptroller's offices in Annapolis and elsewhere statewide, improve cooperation among the department's employees, toughen enforcement of Maryland's 5 percent sales tax and fight cigarette smuggling.

"I hate the word 'status quo.' I hate 'status quo.'" Mr. Schaefer said recently, as he sat in his office. "It means you're going backward."

Since taking office, Mr. Schaefer has fought several political battles, and he has endured some very personal ones.

His longtime friend, Hilda Mae Snoops, who served as his official state hostess during his two terms as governor, died in June after a

lengthy illness.

Then in October, Mr. Schaefer underwent surgery to replace his right knee, a procedure from which he still is recovering and requires twice-weekly rehabilitation sessions.

Recently, the comptroller gashed his palm on a piece of metal at home and had to have stitches.

But it is the loss of Mrs. Snoops that has been the greatest blow to the never-married Mr. Schaefer.

"She was my anchor," he said, sorrow etching itself on his face as he showed off photos of her he keeps in his office. "The worst disease you can have is loneliness."

### Setting his course

Most political observers and legislators give Mr. Schaefer good marks for his first year as the state's chief tax collector.

"I think he's pretty much followed a standard set forth by the previous comptroller, Louis L. Goldstein," said Del. Michael E. Busch, D-Annapolis and chairman of the House Economic Matters Committee. "He's put a lot of emphasis on enforcement and collecting taxes."

Sen. Robert R. Neali, a member of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee, agreed.

"He has made some changes, but in an agency that was headed by one man for the last 40 years, I don't think that's surprising," the Davidsonville Democrat said.

### Ex-deputy blasts away

But Mr. Schaefer, who has homes in Pasadena and Baltimore, is not without his critics.

"I've never been convinced he knew what he was doing," said Robert L. Swann, former longtime deputy comptroller. "He told me he didn't like it (the job)."

Mr. Swann, who was appointed comptroller in the wake of Mr. Goldstein's July 1998 death, headed the department until Mr. Schaefer took over last January.

Mr. Swann returned to his post as deputy comptroller under Mr. Schaefer for several months before retiring this year.

"It was evident to me that anybody who had a close relationship with Louis Goldstein, he (Mr. Schaefer) didn't care for," Mr. Swann said. "He wanted it to be his ship."

Mr. Swann said Mr. Schaefer "browbeat people, like he did as governor," and tried to cancel a July ceremony that had been scheduled to unveil a portrait commissioned of Mr. Goldstein.

Mr. Swann said he and Mr. Schaefer also clashed over where to hang Mr. Goldstein's portrait — Mr. Schaefer wanted it hung in a corner while Mr. Swann wanted it in a more prominent location.

The two finally agreed on a spot near the center of a side wall in the treasury building's main lobby.

"Louis would not have supported him for comptroller," Mr. Swann said of Mr. Schaefer, who clashed with Mr. Goldstein on occasion as governor. "A lot of people are just trying to ride it out."

### Schaefer fires back

But the comptroller brushed aside that criticism, clearly still angry with Mr. Swann, who, Mr. Schaefer said, would reverse his directions to employees.

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"Bobby Swann . . . he didn't want anything to change," Mr. Schaefer said. "He thought it was a reflection on Louie. It wasn't."

But Mr. Schaefer acknowledged there was resistance to many of his changes within the office when he first arrived.

"Remember, they'd all been together 20 years. No changes. Status quo," he said. "In the beginning, no one would talk to me, tell me what was happening."

Once employees realized their jobs were safe, they began to relax and work with him, Mr. Schaefer said.

Since taking over, Mr. Schaefer has launched a clean-up campaign, similar to ones he pushed as mayor and governor, in all of the comptroller's offices statewide.

He also has encouraged employees to volunteer in the community, and he has had workers switch jobs for a month to better understand what their co-workers do.

## Sales tax crackdown

Finally, in perhaps one of his most controversial acts, Mr. Schaefer has beefed up enforcement and collection of Maryland's 5 percent use tax on out-of-state purchases, mainly large items such as furniture.

Renowned for his loyalty to those who have been faithful to him, Mr. Schaefer hired longtime friend and former Anne Arundel County police chief Larry Tolliver to head the Comptroller's Field Enforcement Division.

"I knew Tolliver. He is a hard-nosed, tough guy," Mr. Schaefer said. "I think he's made an impact."

Since the use tax enforcement campaign was launched this summer, the comptroller's office has collected \$33,130 as of Dec. 31.

The enforcement division, which under Mr. Goldstein made few arrests, also has been busy fighting cigarette smuggling. The state hiked the cigarette tax this summer from 36 cents to 66 cents per pack.

Since July 1, the enforcement division under Mr. Tolliver has arrested at least 20 people smuggling cigarettes or trying to sell them illegally, seizing more than 102,000 packs valued at more than \$314,000, which represents a tax loss to the state of more than \$67,300.

## Taking on governor

Along with serving as comptroller, Mr. Schaefer has another, arguably more powerful, role: He's the third member of the state Board of Public Works.

The three-person board, which is headed by Mr. Glendening and also includes Treasurer Richard N. Dixon, is empowered by the General Assembly to approve major construction and consultant contracts, equipment purchases, property transactions and other procurement actions.

With the addition of Mr. Schaefer, the dynamic of the board has changed dramatically. No longer is Mr. Glendening guaranteed a second vote on controversial issues.

In fact, Mr. Schaefer and Mr. Dixon have formed an alliance on several matters, effectively blocking Mr. Glendening.

Among the most notable cases has been the Inter-County Connector, a controversial proposed parkway that would have connected Interstate 270 in Montgomery County with Interstate 95 in Prince George's County.

Supporters have argued for decades that the road is needed to alleviate traffic, but environmentalists have countered it would harm sensitive areas and only encourage sprawl.

After supporting the ICC in the past, Mr. Glendening this year withdrew his backing and moved to kill the plan.

But Mr. Schaefer and Mr. Dixon, both ICC backers, have kept the project alive by refusing to allow

the state to sell any land it has acquired for it.

In what has now become a ritual, at some point during every board meeting Mr. Schaefer brings up the subject of the ICC and two other projects for which he and Mr. Dixon are fighting, despite opposition from Mr. Glendening — a bypass around Manchester, Md., and the construction of a new State Police academy in Carroll County.

Mr. Dixon, who said Mr. Schaefer is doing "a great job," acknowledged that he has benefited from Mr. Schaefer's presence on the board.

"It provides me a great opportunity to be the swing vote," Mr. Dixon said.

While predictions that the usually dull board meetings would become the scenes of frequent, fiery battles between Mr. Schaefer and Mr. Glendening have not come true, relations between the two men remain cool.

"He (doesn't) respect anybody but himself," Mr. Schaefer said of Mr. Glendening. "He always looks beyond the job he has."

The governor, who administration insiders say has chosen to ignore Mr. Schaefer's frequent barbed comments, publicly calls Mr. Schaefer's experience "a true asset" to the board.

"The comptroller certainly has a wonderful sense about how to create excitement," Mr. Glendening said through his spokesman, Michelle Byrnie. "If we didn't disagree once in a while, we wouldn't be doing our jobs."

As he heads into the second year of his four-year term, Mr. Schaefer said he still has a lot of work to accomplish: helping Maryland's wine industry, improving enforcement efforts and making tax credits easier to understand.

"This office is not only to collect taxes, it's to serve people," he said.