

Schaefer Back Where He's Happiest—in Office

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Amid plenty of fanfare, and with his old gang watching, William Donald Schaefer, was sworn in yesterday in Annapolis as Maryland's comptroller, taking over as the state's chief tax collector.

His official return to public life comes four years after he left the governor's office expecting to retire into obscurity. He didn't like it, and it showed.

The death last summer of his buddy Louis L. Goldstein, a Maryland icon who was comptroller for 40 years, offered him the opportunity to return to the life he loved.

And yesterday there was no hiding his joy, marveling at the high school band playing as he arrived, waving to friends, and once again holding court in the historic State House.

"I'm glad to be back," Schaefer, 77, told an adoring audience that crammed the House chamber and spilled into the lobby to witness the ex-governor's return.

Despite recent acerbic criticism of Gov. Parris N. Glendening, the two men were magnanimous to each other yesterday. The two never have been close, but Glendening (D) said he was honored to follow in Schaefer's footsteps. And Schaefer said that no one should expect fireworks when they take their seats on the Board of Public Works, the three-member panel that awards most state contracts. Each man has a single vote, as does the third member, the state treasurer.

"You are going to do a tremendous job," Glendening said before administering the oath of office for the man he replaced four years ago.

Schaefer (D) made it clear yesterday that he has ideas that he wants implemented swiftly. Minutes after taking office, he was suggesting that it might be a good idea to invest a portion of the state employee pension fund in venture capital. He thinks the state ought to take over the Baltimore Convention Center.

And though Glendening has proclaimed himself the education governor, Schaefer said pointedly that "education isn't the only priority." He also wants to

attract new business and jobs by streamlining regulations and simplifying tax laws.

"It was everything he could do not to give another State of the State address," said Timothy F. Maloney, a former state delegate from Prince George's and a Schaefer ally. "You could see it bursting out of him. But I think he understands his role."

To be sure, Schaefer announced yesterday that he is keeping most of Goldstein's old staff in place and that he will do everything he can to safeguard the state's AAA bond rating. In a turnaround from his days as governor, the free-spending Schaefer said he's going to be a penny pincher.

"When I was governor, I was opposed to spending affordability; now I'm the strongest proponent," he said. He was referring to the recommended cap that legislative leaders place on spending each year.

Not everyone was won over by Schaefer's enthusiasm. House Appropriations Committee Chairman Howard P. Rawlings (D-Baltimore) said the General Assembly would consider a state takeover of the Baltimore Convention Center only if Glendening recommended it.

"It's something the governor would have to propose, not the comptroller," Rawlings said. "He would have to put the money in the budget."

But there was little to dampen the festive mood of most revelers. After all, the former Baltimore city council member, mayor and governor was back with a new title. Whatever he is called, many were glad to see Schaefer in Annapolis again.

"There are a whole lot of real happy people in this room," said state Sen. Thomas L. Bromwell (D-Baltimore County), looking at the roomful of Schaefer contemporaries and aides whose reign in Annapolis ended when Schaefer left office.

"We're back," said one former top aide.

"Happy days are here again," said another.

As Schaefer accepted his new role, he said that seeing the band playing as he arrived brought back pleasant memories of his eight years as governor. He ended his 25-minute speech this way: "Old governors never die; they just become comptrollers."