

■ GOVERNMENT

William Donald Schaefer Back in the Saddle Again as a Public Official

BY TOM STUCKEY

Associated Press

When friends threw a big wintertime bash for William Donald Schaefer, some Schaefer loyalists showed up wearing boots, kerchiefs and cowboy hats.

It was a signal that the 78-year-old former governor of Maryland, former mayor of Baltimore, and now state comptroller was back in the saddle again.

After leaving the governor's office in 1995, Schaefer dabbled in the practice of law and tried his hand teaching college courses, but he clearly wasn't happy. When legendary comptroller Louis L. Goldstein died in the summer of 1998, Schaefer jumped at the chance to get back into public office and was elected to the post.

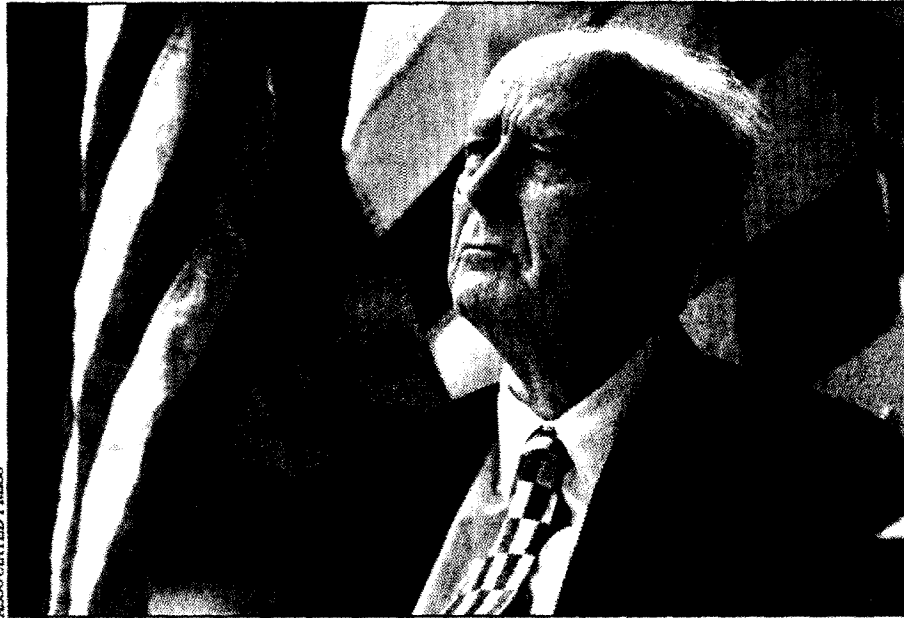
Now, 18 months into his four-year term, it's easy to forget Schaefer ever left public office.

He's back doing the things he always did — exhorting his employees to get out there and serve the people, berating bureaucrats who displease him and renewing his prickly relationship with Gov. Parris Glendening.

The most visible part of the comptroller's job is serving on the Board of Public Works, along with Glendening and Treasurer Richard Dixon, and it is here where the old Schaefer is revealed.

As governor, Schaefer took the middle seat at the massive wood table in the governor's reception room and ran the Wednesday meetings. As comptroller, he sits to the side and plays a supporting role.

Schaefer says he had no problems with the transition.



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Though he often has a familiar scowl on his face, friends of state Comptroller William Donald Schaefer say he's more content now that he's back in public office.

"I had worked on the board. I knew the roles," he said. "I didn't have any trouble transferring to the seat over to the right."

Short-lived truce

All went well at the first meeting in January 1999. The two men joked about selling tickets to all the people who wanted to witness the first explosion. They exchanged candy and flowers. Harmony prevailed.

The truce did not last long.

One month later, as transportation officials defended the governor's decision to cancel plans for a police training center in Carroll County, Schaefer turned to Glendening and scolded him.

"Didn't you promise this?" Schaefer asked. "To make a promise ... and then all

of a sudden say no, that's not right."

Glendening quietly stood his ground.

Dixon, who is from Carroll County, sided with Schaefer, and for months the training center was in limbo before the governor agreed to leave it in Carroll County but move it to a nearby location.

"He put it right where it ought to be. He just wasted a year, that's all," Schaefer said.

The disputes have continued sporadically, with Schaefer usually succeeding, at best, in delaying approval of contracts he dislikes.

Schaefer does not try to gloss over the difficult relationship that dates back to when Schaefer was governor and Glendening was Prince George's County executive.

"There is no love between the gover-

nor and me," Schaefer said. "I wouldn't say I'm overly fond of him, and he's not overly fond of me, but we get things done."

Bob Douglas, a lawyer who was a close adviser and press secretary to Schaefer when he was governor, said his former boss is playing an important role "by not taking anything at face value, by not playing favorites and grilling the bureaucrats, the lawyers and the vendors."

"I think that with treasurer Dixon, the two of them have been able to create a much stronger check and balance system than existed before," he said.

And how would Schaefer have reacted as governor if Goldstein and then-treasurer Lucille Maurer had gotten together to block his initiatives?

"He'd have gone ballistic," Douglas said. "He'd have had 27 meltdowns by now."

Comfort level

The understated Glendening said Schaefer "does add a certain level of excitement to the board," but that he is not upset by the former governor's attempts to block some of his administration programs.

"I give him his five minutes of visibility," Glendening said. "He is an equal member of the board."

Schaefer hasn't changed since leaving the governor's office and "I don't think he'll change in the next three years," Glendening said.

While Schaefer moved aggressively to establish his position on the board, he showed greater restraint in putting his own stamp on the office that Goldstein had ruled for almost 40 years.