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Schaefer presents a 'plateful' of ideas aimed at social problems

By John W. Frece
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A resilient Gov. William Donald Schaefer aroused the General Assembly from its budgetary exhaustion yesterday with a surprisingly ambitious and often innovative legislative agenda aimed at preventing a host of societal problems, from violent crime to unwanted children to disease.

The broad program, which took Mr. Schaefer nearly an hour to outline in his seventh State of the State address, ranged from offering vasectomies to soon-to-be-released

prison inmates to starting a pilot program that would give 200 low-income public school children \$2,900 vouchers to help pay for tuition at private schools, or to enroll

The text of Governor Schaefer's speech. **14A**

in public schools in other districts.

□ To prevent cancer and other diseases, Mr. Schaefer called for creation of a new state council to focus specifically on preventable health disorders that afflict women. He also wants to prohibit tobacco companies from giving away free

cigarette samples.

□ To slow the spread of AIDS, he proposed for the second year in a row that those infected with the AIDS virus be identified in confidential medical records by name, just as carriers of other contagious disease are listed. Advocates for AIDS victims oppose such an effort, saying it would lead to discrimination.

□ To put a crimp in violent crime, the governor proposed banning assault pistols, clamping regulations on the sale of weapons at

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BARBARA HADDOCK/STAFF PHOTO

Governor Schaefer tells the General Assembly, "In your hands and my hands is the future of the kids, the future of the state."

Fired-up Schaefer offers measures on teen pregnancy to school vouchers

SCHAEFER, from 1A

gun shows, and making carjacking a specific crime with a 15-year mandatory prison sentence. He also wants to give police more authority to cooperate across jurisdictional lines, and to charge auto insurers a dollar per policy to pay for a vehicle-theft prevention program his aides say was successful in Michigan.

□ He called for tax incentives for research and development firms; for statewide uniform building standards; for expansion of the Baltimore Convention Center; and for passage of bills to bolster the state's regulatory powers over the insurance industry in general and Blue Cross/Blue Shield in particular.

The sheer scope of the governor's proposals caught lawmakers still recovering from three years of budget problems off-guard.

"It certainly was a plateful," marveled Sen. Donald F. Munson, a Washington County Republican.

Mr. Schaefer knew it. But ever impatient, the 71-year-old governor chided and challenged the legislature, warning its members that they cannot afford to wait to address issues as serious as teen pregnancy, the increase in violent crime and the steady expansion of welfare rolls.

He said he welcomed the end of 1992, calling it "the toughest year I've ever had."

"We couldn't build. We had to reduce. We couldn't move forward. We had to retreat. We had to cut programs that helped people," Mr. Schaefer said.

Now, buoyed by prospects of "a slow, steady recovery," the governor tried to rally legislators to action much the way he did early in his first term.

"We now have a chance to continue the progress that made Maryland a leader," he said.

But some 39 minutes into a speech that was not interrupted even once by applause, Mr. Schaefer sensed he might be losing his audience.

Removing his reading glasses, he leaned casually onto the rostrum and shifted into a more conversational tone: "I can see it in your eyes: 'Why don't you give us a break?' [But] everything here is important." He extended his right hand and added: "In your hands and my hands is the future of the kids, the future of the state."

He characterized his program as "a sincere effort to get the state going," but said he didn't mind if people

"He's swinging for the fences on a number of issues."

THOMAS V. MIKE MILLER JR.
Senate president

thought his ideas were wrong. "I'm beyond that," he said. However, he urged those who disagree not to just say no, but to come up with something better.

He urged legislators to put aside festering jurisdictional and political squabbles in the best interests of the state, but some, including Montgomery County Democratic Sen. Mary Boegers, said past slights are not likely to be forgotten so easily.

Most legislators applauded the governor for his courage and vision. Yet many seemed worried about the political or practical implications of embracing programs that foster and promote birth control, or which tell insurers they must offer policies to citizens even if they have pre-existing medical conditions, or which seek fuller accounting of the proceeds from legal slot machine gambling in Eastern Shore fraternal clubs.

Many said they were worried the state had not recovered sufficiently from its financial problems of the past three years to afford such a program.

"I'm real concerned," said Senate Minority Leader John A. Cade, an influential Anne Arundel County Republican who sits on the Budget and Taxation Committee. "I don't want to see so many new initiatives while the financial situation is the way it is right now. Across the board, I think we need to be cautious."

But Frederick W. Puddester, the governor's deputy budget secretary, said most of Mr. Schaefer's new initiatives were not that costly. He said most new spending in the Fiscal 1994 budget that will be introduced later this month involves restoration of state aid to local governments that was slashed the last couple years. For instance, local health programs, decimated by reductions that dropped state funding from \$34 million to \$14 million this year, would be restored to a \$30 million level, he said. Mr. Schaefer also will propose full funding of a scheduled \$120 million increase in state aid for public schools.

The governor's multifaceted attack on family problems was among

the proposals legislators applauded most. Mr. Schaefer hopes to prevent unwanted pregnancies by expanding family planning counseling, offering Norplant and other contraceptives to women, and sterilization through vasectomies to men leaving prison.

To help the state save on welfare costs, Mr. Schaefer proposed a several-pronged effort to insure that families take financial responsibilities for their offspring. They include reporting delinquent child support payments to credit agencies, making grandparents responsible for child support when their minor children have kids, and suspending or revoking the drivers' licenses of people with delinquent child support payments.

"He did a great job on child support," said Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller Jr., a Prince George's County Democrat.

Mr. Miller, however, was less supportive of other proposals, saying he did not like the idea of giving students a chance to choose which school they attend, even as a pilot program.

He also said Mr. Schaefer may be biting off more than the legislature is willing to chew by proposing an assault pistols ban, tougher exhaust emissions standards for cars sold in the state, and repeal of the existing automatic right of criminal defendants to appeal district court convictions to the state's circuit courts — issues that have all failed in past sessions.

"He's swinging for the fences on a number of issues," Mr. Miller said.

However successful his prevention proposals may be, Mr. Schaefer said they alone would not solve the social problems that are leaving families divided, children abused, and courts, juvenile services programs and prisons all clogged — at a heavy cost to the state.

To look for more novel solutions, the governor said he had appointed Baltimore lawyer and former U.S. Attorney General Benjamin R. Civiletti to chair a new Welfare Policy Commission that will search for ways to reduce the welfare rolls.

"He'll look at proposals whether they are radical or not," Mr. Schaefer said. He said he wants the commission to consider even such extreme proposals as requiring women to use Norplant, or men to have vasectomies, if they are on welfare and have a certain number of illegitimate children. "I'm not proposing that," Mr. Schaefer said, but said he feels all ideas must be considered.