

Living on the cheap side does little for state or national pride

In the past couple of weeks, complaints were coming in about some additional silver and china that Governor and Mrs. Hughes wanted to fill out a full 72-place setting for Government House, the official residence of Maryland's governors.

In hard economic times when budgets were being pared, there was bitching that Mrs. Hughes shouldn't be spending the requested \$13,000.

That question is now settled. The request has been withdrawn. Mrs. Hughes will ask the public to help provide her with china and the silver that should have been on the premises in the first place. She will need it to entertain a long list of visiting foreigners as well the citizenry of Maryland.

The question that was not asked was why the standards of Government House had slipped so badly. It had been in an admittedly shabby condition. And, with little recourse to public funds but with the aid of groups like the Maryland Historical Society, Mrs. Hughes has been able to have three public rooms redone in the authentic style of historical eras. The results are



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stunning, something that should bring pride to Marylanders.

The trouble is that Americans are ambivalent when it comes to their governors and their presidents. Yes, they do believe in class. But, no, they don't want to pay for it. Maryland's Government House is as much a symbol of the state as the White House is a symbol of the nation. It should be a place to show off the state's past as a backdrop to the present.

Now, the public's complaints have turned to the cost of President Reagan's trips home to "to water the horses." And hold on, wait until the bills come in for Mrs. Reagan's refurbishing of

the living quarters of the White House.

The people who complain about our spending would be the first to holler foul if President Reagan went to London and was treated to a shabby fish and chips dinner on Woolworth's finest china.

That, of course, will never happen. The British believe in style, elegance, aesthetics, if you will. They believe in spending for symbols that instill pride in a nation. There must be a point to it, for American visitors ooh and ah over British fineries and make up the throngs around Buckingham Palace for a long-shot glimpse of royalty.

Let our presidents enjoy their time off. President Eisenhower's golf and fishing made him a better man when he was in the White House. The same for President Kennedy's sailing and President Johnson's trips to his ranch. It is preferable to have presidents get away from the White House maelstrom than have them hunker down in isolation.

The same goes for refurbishing official quarters. Mrs. Reagan will be joining a long list of

White House wives who have added the touches that pleased them and their husbands. The cost, whatever it may be, is undoubtedly worth it for the serenity of the man in our highest office.

Mrs. Hughes, it should be understood, is not spending for the private desires of her family. She has turned the public rooms of Government House in the right direction.

Last week, Mrs. Hughes felt awful about the complaints on spending. There was the misunderstanding over the necessity for three cooks on the staff. "There have always been three cooks," she explained, working shifts seven days a week for the staff and family, not to mention official functions.

Mrs. Hughes seems to be passing with ease through the stress that damages many political wives. "There's something about that public eye and constant visibility that can get you," she admits. "We really live in a goldfish bowl."

Time is the problem. "Everybody wants a piece of the Governor. That comes with the territory," she said. "At first, he was pretty frazzled, meeting every request.

"Now we schedule together. We schedule private time together, to give us a chance to get the whole picture."

The political partnership has gone together for 26 years. The memories are not all of Government House. There are those of shaking hands at 6 a.m. in the cold outside of a Cumberland tire factory up until the election day when the outsider, Harry Roe Hughes, became Governor.

Another memory would have to be Inauguration Day 1981. While Governor and Mrs. Hughes did their official duties, their daughter, Beth, a University of Maryland student, and a friend, watched the parade and waved "ERA" pennants of protest. Mrs. Hughes was amused by the incident. She, too, is pro-ERA but believes the constitutional amendment drive may have died.

A serious reader, she put down "In Search of Alexander" recently to dip into some bits of "Don Quixote." She wasn't sure why. Perhaps, we may suggest, it's because once the Hughes clan looked like windmill tilters but now has reached and is living the impossible dream.