

Incoming Speaker Taylor Looks For Aggressive Response to Republicans

BY TOM STUCKEY

Associated Press

Casper Taylor, the man designated as the next speaker of the House of Delegates, will take office with an appeal to Democrats to be more aggressive in meeting a growing Republican challenge in Maryland.

Taylor told Democratic delegates after they selected him as speaker Tuesday that he hopes the House can do its business in a bipartisan fashion during the 1994 session.

"We can hope the session will not be contaminated by too much campaign rhetoric" from Republicans, the Allegany County Democrat said.

"But if it is, it won't go unchecked," he said.

"We must be able to show voters that Democrats here are decisive, not divisive," Taylor said.

Democrats took just 12 minutes to select Taylor to succeed R. Clayton Mitchell as speaker. No one challenged him, and the vote was unanimous.

Taylor will be formally elected by the full House when the 1994 session convenes Jan. 12, but endorsement of the Democrat Caucus assures election by the overwhelmingly Democratic House.

In a brief speech after his selection, Taylor said his priorities will be strengthening criminal laws, balancing the needs of the environment and business, holding down the spiraling cost of health care and holding the line on government spending.

Maryland faces budget deficits of \$40 million this year and \$70 million next year because of the lingering effects of the recession, Taylor said.

"All proposals, no matter how meritorious, will have to be considered in light

of the budget deficit," he said.

Taylor, 58, is the first Allegany County resident ever chosen as speaker. And like three of the last four speakers, he comes from a rural county.

Taylor reached out to delegates from urban areas of the state, telling them "I know the importance to the entire state of the jewel of Baltimore City and of the population centers of Montgomery and Prince George's counties."

Taylor pledged to see that all areas of the state are treated equally in the scramble for state aid.

Mitchell announced his resignation as speaker Nov. 15. The battle to succeed him ended 24 hours later when potential rivals withdrew from the race for speaker and the House leadership endorsed Taylor.

Gov. William Donald Schaefer helped

Taylor round up votes, and the new speaker promised to work with the governor, "who is my friend."

But he said he "will protect the will and integrity of the House" in his dealings with Schaefer and Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller.

Despite the unanimous vote, some Democratic backbenchers were unhappy about the way the way the choice of a new speaker was made.

"I think it was shoddy and shabby and didn't need to

be done," said Delegate Leon Billings, D-Montgomery. He said Taylor would probably have been elected unanimously even if there had been an open debate among all Democrats, but he said that would have made rank and file Democrats feel like they have a say in running the House.

Asked if he expects Taylor will run a more open House than Mitchell, Billings replied, "He can't be less open."

"Clay did not run an open House. Clay ran an autocracy," he said.

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