

# Speaker is cleared of wrongdoing

Taylor's use of trooper was 'mistake,' prosecutor says

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House Speaker Casper R. Taylor Jr. "made a mistake" by asking a state trooper to accompany an aide to a political event last month, but did not violate the law or misuse his office, the Maryland state prosecutor concluded in a report released yesterday.

"The law does not punish public officers for making mistakes or errors in judgment when performing discretionary acts," State Prosecutor Stephen Montanarelli wrote in a five-page summary of his inquiry. "In this case we find no corrupt behavior on the part of the speaker."

Leaders of the Maryland Re-

publican Party had asked Montanarelli to investigate Taylor's request for a state trooper to accompany an aide to a political event. Taylor is a Democrat.

Taylor said in a statement he was pleased by the prosecutor's findings and called the complaint "dirty politics."

Taylor had agreed to attend a meet-the-candidates night sponsored by the Allegany County League of Women Voters on July 18, but canceled because he was serving as host of a legislative leadership retreat at Rocky Gap State Park.

Taylor asked his Flintstone office assistant, Rhonda Robinson, to appear in his place.

According to the prosecutor's report, Robinson learned that several protesters opposed to Taylor's support for a Western Maryland racetrack might appear at the forum.

Taylor arranged for the

trooper assigned to drive him, Cpl. Larry Barnes, to accompany Robinson to the meeting. About 70 people attended, and there was no disturbance.

The prosecutor found that Robinson went on her own time and was not paid by state funds.

Taylor had previously acknowledged that assigning a trooper to a political event was a mistake, and he reimbursed the state police \$94 for mileage and the officer's time.

"He had other options, but took the most practical, probably most effective approach. It was the wrong one, but not a corrupt one," Montanarelli wrote.

State GOP executive director Paul Ellington said he was disturbed that state law contains no penalties for employees who engage in political activities while on the clock. He also scoffed at concerns about safety.