

Cas Taylor's laurels are well-deserved

■ **Allegany's champion:** *A thoughtful man of action, the Allegany delegate delivers.*

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SOMEBODY gets it. On May 27, House Speaker Casper R. Taylor Jr. gets an honorary doctorate — in humane letters — from Frostburg State University.

This laurel comes as Mr. Taylor encounters homefront controversies on the education and gun fronts. Without the degree and the overwhelming victory of his political ally in this week's race for mayor of Cumberland, one might be inclined to say that no good deed goes unpunished.

A political lifetime of deeds in Mr. Taylor's case.

Mr. Taylor's tenure in Annapolis has meant hundreds of new jobs for a desperately poor region. What a boon for Allegany, a county with no intrinsic political power. It had never had a speaker. Western Maryland as a whole has not had one in 100 years.

From his position of authority, Casper Taylor insisted upon a range of special rescue efforts for his region. Everything from prisons to golf courses and historic railroads have come to the county as a result of his doggedly visionary insistence.

In the last legislative session, he secured grants of money to ease his county into recognition of diffi-

cult change in its over-built, under-populated public school system. He convinced Gov. Parris N. Glendening to add \$1 million for an already generous allocation of \$3.3 million for Allegany schools — money needed to allow time for a performance audit, an evaluation of what works and what doesn't in the county's system.

Nothing is more sensitive for local communities than schools. Advocates of school consolidation, including Allegany's board of education, rejected the \$1 million, maintaining that closing rural schools could not be put off yet again. To them, Mr. Taylor's plan was an impediment to better local schools. *But his actions have hardly been nefarious or self-serving, as some have charged.*

Mr. Taylor incurred more unhappiness with his vote in favor of a bill that will require gunlocks on weapons purchased in Maryland after 2003. It is customary to say such a vote was a courageous one for politicians in rural areas where guns can be sacred. But most gun owners have no problem with gun safety — and that is what this bill promotes.

An election in Cumberland this week swept Mr. Taylor's friend and ally, Lee Fiedler, into the mayor's office and voters lifted the ban on flouridated water. Both of those decisions are good for the region — and should be a tonic to the speaker whose record makes him a Western Maryland treasure.