

# Del. Cas Taylor calls in cavalry to lock in House speaker's job

By Marina Sarris  
and John W. Frece  
Staff Writers

Cas Taylor's political future looked grim last Monday morning.

His dream job — to become speaker of the Maryland House of Delegates — was suddenly, unexpectedly within his grasp.

But it appeared to have been promised to someone else.

Word that House Speaker R. Clayton Mitchell Jr. was preparing to announce his retirement had already generated a plan to replace him with his second in command, Del. Gary Alexander of Prince George's County.

The idea was that Mr. Alexander, who has said he won't seek re-election in 1994, would be a caretaker speaker for a year.

Then, said his supporters, others could battle it out for a full four-year term.

But Mr. Taylor stubbornly refused to go along. He began working the phones and, with subtle but early support from the governor and his aides, threw together an impressive coalition of rural and disaffected suburban lawmakers.

Within 48 hours, the job was all but his.

House Democrats are expected to ratify Mr. Taylor's selection at a caucus tomorrow.

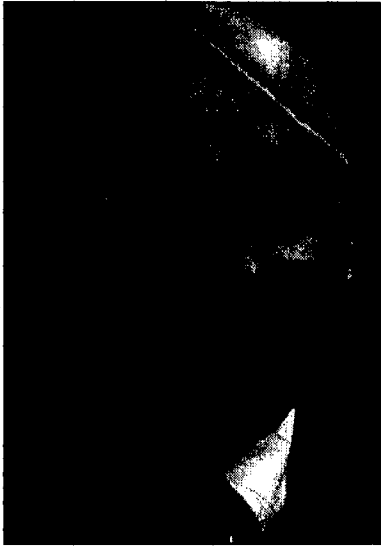
Those who were stunned by Mr. Taylor's overnight success may have underestimated the 58-year-old former bar owner from Cumberland. The most experienced of Mr. Mitchell's lieutenants, he had spent years quietly building the foundation for his own bid to become speaker. He did not want to risk a year's delay.

As chairman of the Economic Matters Committee since 1987, Mr. Taylor started with a power base Mr. Alexander did not have. He had, over the years, gained his committee's allegiance largely by paying attention to the problems and concerns of its rank-and-file members.

That attention meant a lot to people used to the rigid caste system of the House, a system in which a few leaders hand-picked by the speaker often call the shots for everyone else. Mr. Taylor, many thought, might open up that process.

By Monday afternoon, members of his committee began repaying him by manning the phones on his behalf.

They solidified support among rural lawmakers, principally from Southern Maryland and Mr. Taylor's home region of Western Maryland. Suburban delegations that believed they had been too low in the pecking



1991 PHOTO

Cas Taylor, 58, drew heavy support from the rural districts.

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DEL. GARY ALEXANDER

order for too long joined in.

Gov. William Donald Schaefer and several of his aides also began lobbying for Mr. Taylor, a reward for his years of steady loyalty to the governor.

Moreover, Mr. Schaefer's aides looked suspiciously at Mr. Alexander, an articulate 51-year-old lawyer. He came from the same Prince George's County district as Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller Jr., a frequent thorn in the governor's side.

With Mr. Alexander in power, they worried that Senator Miller could become too influential in House matters.

At the very least, Prince George's County would claim two of the three most influential positions in state government — House speaker and Senate president — a concentration of power that worried lawmakers from other jurisdictions as much as it worried the governor.

Some delegates also were concerned that the House might drift under a caretaker speaker and that nothing of substance would be accomplished — a worrisome prospect as an election approaches.

The governor, too, wanted the session — his last — to be worth remembering.

With a short-timer in the speaker's chair, it undoubtedly would be harder for Mr. Schaefer to get his legislative agenda enacted. So he made a few calls to lawmakers.

Meanwhile, with Mr. Mitchell no longer a threat to their political lives, some delegates began grumbling about what they considered the arrogance of it all.

Once again, they complained, Mr. Mitchell's allies in the Appropriations Committee had cut a deal and expected the rest of the House to go along blindly.

Specific blame was placed on two Alexander-backers: Baltimore's Howard P. Rawlings, the committee chairman, and Timothy F. Maloney of Prince George's, who chairs two powerful subcommittees.

The speculation was that when Mr. Alexander's interim reign was over, either Mr. Rawlings or Mr. Maloney might try to put themselves first in line to succeed him.

Just such a scenario was rumored to be in the works as early as last summer, although Mr. Alexander and the other principals deny it. Mr. Alexander says that while he was willing to go along with an interim solution, “I made it clear I didn't want to be part of a bloody political battle.”

But Tuesday morning, Mr. Alexander said, he was struck by the image of a political cartoon in *The Sun* that depicted Mr. Mitchell “leaving an empty chair and a bunch of clowns trying to jump in.”

“I didn't want to go through a protracted battle. It was bad for the image of the House, which needed to be strong and united,” he said.

By then, Mr. Taylor said, he was in a position to beat Mr. Alexander, although the claim was never put to a test. “I had enough votes to win. That's why I didn't blink,” he said.

Mr. Alexander was still undecided what to do as House leaders convened for a second closed meeting Tuesday afternoon.

But once the discussion began, he said he decided to put a speedy end to any in-fighting by pulling out of the race.

By then, it appeared to be too late for other candidates to jump in.

With Mr. Alexander suddenly gone and no alternative candidate on the field, the committee chairmen threw their support unanimously behind Mr. Taylor.