



Photos by Paul W. Gillespie — The Capital

Comptroller William Donald Schaefer arrives for his last day at the office this morning. Always a colorful and feisty character, Mr. Schaefer was speechless at times during the welcome.

'We Love You Boss'

William Donald Schaefer rides into political sunset

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Hundreds of William Donald Schaefer's employees stood in the cold this morning awaiting their boss on his final day of work.

When he arrived, they roared, waving "We Love You Boss" and similar signs as the band from Annapolis High School played and an honor guard stood bearing the colors.

The sometimes-irascible Mr. Schaefer stood frozen by emotion at the curb as staffers put a top hat on him and gave him a bunch of roses.

For once, Mr. Schaefer was speechless.

He teared up, and stood there for a few minutes composing himself. At one point, before he walked into the Goldstein Treasury Building in Annapolis for the last time,

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Comptroller William Donald Schaefer receives a surprise send-off this morning on his last day as state comptroller. The sign "Schaefer Little Girl" refers to his habit of calling women "Little girls," which some voters found condescending and sexist. He was unseated in last year's Democratic primary.

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he characteristically clowned, pulling out his handkerchief and faking a big cry, perhaps to mask the real emotion in his eyes.

"We love you," the ladies squealed. Another employee had his daughter atop his shoulders holding a sign "Little Girls for Schaefer."

With television cameras rolling, he made his way up the steps, pausing to make a few comments before entering the building.

"Like General MacArthur said, old comptrollers never die, they just fade away. Thank you. Thank you," he said.

What will he do now?

"Sleep," he said.

He eschewed the term "boss" that so many signs declared, saying, "I'm nothing. I've worked with wonderful people in the city and state. This gang here, I don't have to tell them what to do, they just do it. And they do it well."

As he took the last couple of steps into the foyer, ducks flew overhead, in formation. "A Maryland fly-over," someone shouted.

"I don't want a handshake, I want a hug," Elizabeth Rogers of Brooklyn Park said to her boss as he was walking in the door. He obliged.

"I am going to miss him. I can't think of a more wonderful boss to have. I hate to see him go," she said.

Standing quietly in the back was the department's longest serving employee, Glen Trott.

"He had been a wonderful boss, really good to his employees," Mr. Trott said of this, his third comptroller. "He has dedicated his life to service. I hope he'll find something to do," the 42-year employee said.

Once in the foyer, Mr. Schaefer was serenaded by a group of employees who changed the lyrics to his favorite song, "Oh, Johnny, Oh Johnny, Oh," to "Oh, Donny."

SCHAEFER HIGHLIGHTS

William Donald Schaefer has held public office almost continuously since 1955. The following are some of the highlights of his life and career:

- Born in west Baltimore on Nov. 2, 1921.
- Graduated from Baltimore City College in 1939 and received law degree 1942.
- 1940s served in World War II.
- Baltimore City Council 1955-1971.
- Mayor City of Baltimore, 1971-1987.
- First phase of Convention Center opens, 1979.
- Harborplace opens, 1980 — attracts 13 million tourists a year.
- Aquarium opens, 1981.
- Esquire magazine names him "Best Mayor in America" in 1984.
- Civic Center renovated and renamed Baltimore Arena, 1986.
- Governor, 1987-1995.
- Oriole Park at Camden Yards opened April 1992.
- Light Rail service began April 1992.
- Comptroller, 1999-today.
- Recipient of 15 honorary degrees.

Again he was moved to tears. After a few more words for the camera he slowly moved down the hall, to work.

Mr. Schaefer's career ranged from serving as an alderman in Baltimore in the 1950s, to being governor of the state for two terms in the 1980s and 1990s. He leaves behind five decades of public service, and on Monday, his successor as chief tax collector, former Del. Peter Franchot, a Montgomery County Democrat, will take office.

Mr. Schaefer always said his favorite job was serving as mayor of Baltimore, a position he held for 16 years, from 1971 to 1987.

Whether pushing Baltimore and the state to make progress, or using regressive and sexist language, Mr. Schaefer always thought of himself as a man of the people, so much so that when he was elected governor, he wanted to continue living in his Baltimore row house, and didn't move into the governor's mansion until someone told him the state constitution required it.

This populism came out in his most recent campaign, when he put out a bumper sticker that made the populist appeal: *Schaefer: He says what you think.*

Now 85, Mr. Schaefer recently

displayed some of his old fire during an interview with *The Capital* and discussed some of his rivalries.

While he has always enjoyed fighting with other politicians, Mr. Schaefer's staff members describe him as committed and loyal.

"He's everybody's favorite uncle," public affairs officer Michael Golden said recently.

They also say he could be demanding, and ranked foot-dragging bureaucrats as a blight to progress.

A World War II veteran, Mr. Schaefer retired in 1979 as a colonel in the U.S. Army Reserve. He ran unsuccessfully for the General Assembly in 1950.

A friend in the legislature who would one day become governor, Marvin Mandel, urged Mr. Schaefer to run in 1954 for City Council, and Mr. Schaefer won, thereby launching one of the longest-running political careers in the state's history.

Former Anne Arundel County Executive O. James Lighthizer recently called Mr. Schaefer, "the finest public servant I have ever met."

Mr. Mandel recently said of his old friend and colleague, "He is completely honest — he will never change."

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