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First, let's acknowledge a bias: We are fond of Helen Delich Bentley. There is no more tireless crusader for Baltimore's maritime interests than the 82-year-old former congresswoman. It is a role that has sometimes put her at odds with Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr.'s Transportation Department. No surprise there: Mrs. Bentley has never been a shrinking violet - whether she was covering the port for The Sun (where she got her start 60 years ago) or defending it today.

But at a black-tie celebration of the port's 300th anniversary last week, Mr. Ehrlich announced that he had decided to rename Baltimore's port the Helen Delich Bentley Port of Baltimore. And with that we can only ask, what kind of cold medicine was the governor taking that night?

According to the American Association of Port Authorities, no U.S. seaport has ever been named after a person, let alone a living one. Baltimore has never even named so much as a terminal after someone. But now without so much as a public hearing or a cost estimate (and it's likely to be substantial - the recent renaming of BWI to Baltimore-Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport was tagged at \$2 million to cover signs, letterhead and such), Mr. Ehrlich has rewarded a political ally.

It's bad enough that Maryland politicians have a penchant for naming things after each other. The fact that Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller works at the Miller Senate Office Building is one of those self-congratulatory indulgences that gives Annapolis that unmistakable air of cronyism. But this sets a new standard: Mrs. Bentley's got 45 miles of city waterfront.

What's next, the Harry R. Hughes Chesapeake Bay? The William Donald Schaefer City of Baltimore?

Let's not name public landmarks on a whim or as a political favor. Mrs. Bentley deeply deserves to be honored. But renaming the entire port by executive fiat is a shallow way to go about it.

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