

The Quest for Statehood; Go Back to Maryland? Legislators Say No Way: [FINAL Edition]

[ProQuest document link](#)

ABSTRACT (ABSTRACT)

Gov. [William Donald Schaefer] does not have the power to accept the District into Maryland. Under the Maryland State Constitution, an act passed by the state legislature is necessary to accept land from the United States. For purposes of my survey, I asked these legislators to assume that Congress would not simply end the federal payment (currently \$430 million) upon retrocession, but that it would continue to pay half of this annual sum to Maryland in recognition of the police, fire and other services that Maryland would be providing to the operation of the federal government.

The comments that the legislators wrote on my questionnaire are even more revealing than the raw statistics. The respondents were given a space in which they could write any remarks, but they were not required to do so. One delegate wrote, "With all the problems associated with the District, I would not support any effort to return this territory to Maryland." Another said, "I would not want Maryland to accept the District of Columbia under any circumstances."

FULL TEXT

Lawrence Mirel, a former general counsel to the D.C. Council, recently argued on this page that although statehood is "justified and desirable," residents of the District should give serious consideration to Gov. William Donald Schaefer's suggestion that the District become part of Maryland {Close to Home, March 4}.

Retrocession, or any other idea to end the District's neo-colonial status, is indeed worthy of consideration. But as a political matter, it's a nonstarter and a potential diversion from the District's drive for statehood.

Gov. Schaefer does not have the power to accept the District into Maryland. Under the Maryland State Constitution, an act passed by the state legislature is necessary to accept land from the United States.

In connection with an article on the future of D.C. home rule that I have written for the next issue of the Catholic University Law Review, I recently surveyed Maryland state legislators on the subject of District retrocession. The results could hardly have been more negative.

For purposes of my survey, I asked these legislators to assume that Congress would not simply end the federal payment (currently \$430 million) upon retrocession, but that it would continue to pay half of this annual sum to Maryland in recognition of the police, fire and other services that Maryland would be providing to the operation of the federal government.

Forty-seven percent of the members of the House of Delegates, and 51 percent of the senators responded. Of those responding, 82 percent of the delegates and 92 percent of the senators said that they would not accept retrocession even if Congress continued to provide a \$215 million annual payment. Only one senator and six delegates out of the 91 legislators who responded were willing to take the District back.

The comments that the legislators wrote on my questionnaire are even more revealing than the raw statistics. The respondents were given a space in which they could write any remarks, but they were not required to do so. One delegate wrote, "With all the problems associated with the District, I would not support any effort to return this territory to Maryland." Another said, "I would not want Maryland to accept the District of Columbia under any circumstances."

A Republican delegate said that Maryland was "tough enough for Republicans now. This would make potential progress that much more difficult." A delegate explained that "the State of Maryland has enough problems without

accepting those of D.C."

A senator wrote that "Maryland has a city with similar problems to Washington-high crime rates, high property taxes, poor schools, high rates of drug use, high teenage pregnancy, a dwindling population and a decaying manufacturing base. To accept another city with most of these problems would greatly strap state resources."

Still other legislators were more pointed in their remarks, such as the one who said, "This sounds like a bad dream," or the senator who sent me his "Thanks but no thanks. One would hope you had more important projects underway."

My survey was completed before the governor spoke favorably about retrocession, and perhaps some legislators will reconsider their views now that the governor has chosen to exercise moral and political leadership on this issue. But the margin and intensity of legislative opposition seem too great to overcome.

While statehood, too, faces difficult political obstacles, a considerable amount of the opposition to it may relate to fear by members of Congress that a vote for D.C. statehood might be perceived back home as an endorsement of Mayor Barry. If the District gets a new mayor next January, its petition for statehood could get a fresh start on Capitol Hill. -Philip G. Schrag is a professor of law at Georgetown University.

DETAILS

Publication title:	The Washington Post (pre-1997 Fulltext); Washington, D.C.
Pages:	b08
Number of pages:	0
Publication year:	1990
Publication date:	Mar 11, 1990
column:	Close to Home
Section:	OP/ED
Publisher:	WP Company LLC d/b/a The Washington Post
Place of publication:	Washington, D.C.
Country of publication:	United States, Washington, D.C.
Publication subject:	General Interest Periodicals--United States
ISSN:	01908286
Source type:	Newspaper
Language of publication:	English
Document type:	NEWSPAPER
ProQuest document ID:	307255495

Document URL: http://proxy-bc.researchport.umd.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/quest-statehood-go-back-maryland-legislators-say/docview/307255495/se-2?accountid=14577

Copyright: Copyright The Washington Post Company Mar 11, 1990

Last updated: 2010-08-19

Database: The Washington Post

LINKS

[Find It @UMBC](#)

Database copyright © 2024 ProQuest LLC. All rights reserved.

[Terms and Conditions](#) [Contact ProQuest](#)