

Lavishing the largess on the campaign trail

By Sean Scully
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The money fairy is on the move again in Maryland. With a new legislative session looming and an election less than a year away, Maryland Gov. Parris N. Glendening has begun his annual dance, dispensing state largess to local governments and proposing sound-bite friendly programs for the masses.

Yesterday, it was Rockville, where he doled out almost \$6 million in state and federal money to help upgrade the city's aging water plant. The money is part of a \$17 million federal grant, matched by \$3 million from the state, to ensure "clean water" in Maryland.

"Certainly, the citizens of Maryland have a right to expect an education; jobs to support a family; good, affordable health care; and safe neighborhoods," the governor said, as a light drizzle of presumably clean water began to fall from the sky. "Certainly, in our homes, we have a right to expect — and deserve — safe drinking water."

The announcement came only two days after the governor showed up in Baltimore to offer \$40 million in low-interest mort-

gages for home buyers in 34 older communities around the state. Home buyers would receive a 4 percent loan, about half what buyers in the open market are now paying.

And that same day, the governor proposed picking up part of the college tuition for students taking technology-related classes, a move to boost the state's science and technology industries. State officials can't say how much the program would cost but estimates range as high



as \$12 million.

In recent weeks, the governor has raised the prospect of a health care program for working poor families — an idea he floated unsuccessfully last year — and a financial package of up to \$250 million to help Prince George's County schools end its 25-year-old busing program.

"I think the governor needs a character transplant, but absent

that, he can pass out a lot of state money," House Minority Whip Robert Flanagan, Howard County Republican, said. "It's good old-fashioned politics."

The General Assembly convenes Jan. 14. Mr. Glendening faces re-election during the party primary in September and, if he wins that, the general election two months later. He faces a stiff challenge in both races.

This is "what governors traditionally do when they want to get re-elected, brag about all the money," said William J. Skinner, president of the Maryland Taxpayers League, "but nobody in Annapolis is talking about the poor taxpayer."

But the governor resolutely denies that he is doing anything unusual.

"It's all part of the natural process," he said yesterday.

The clean-water grant, for example, has been in process since May, he said. The federal budget only just passed, and yesterday was the earliest possible day to announce the grant.

The money dance is an annual event. By this time last year, the governor had proposed a 10 percent income-tax cut, free health care for working-poor mothers, free college tuition for Maryland residents and a \$254 million bailout for Baltimore city public schools.

The governor didn't get his health care and tuition plans last year. He got the tax cut and the Baltimore deal, but only after taking a political beating.

This year, he's being a little

more careful. Many of the programs he is proposing are not as expensive for the state as last year's package would have been.

The low-cost mortgage program, for example, would be paid for by a one-time savings from refinancing long-term bonds. The clean-water grants are mostly paid for by the federal government. And his new tuition and health care programs are more modest than the ones he backed last year.

And there's good news for the governor and spending-minded legislators, all of whom face re-election along with the governor. Because of better-than-expected economic growth, the state stands to have extra money at the end of next year. By some estimates, largely from General Assembly financial analysts, the surplus will exceed \$300 million.

The governor's budget staff plays down that figure, saying it is probably exaggerated. But they agree there will be a surplus — just in time for the 1998 election.

■ Sean Scully covers Maryland politics for The Washington Times.

Metropolitan Times

Metropolitan Editor: Kenneth M. McIntyre
Deputy Editor: Steve Crane

Features Editor:
Deputy Editor:
Society Editor:

Carleton Bryant
Cathryn Donohoe
Kevin Chaffee

HOW TO CALL US

Main switchboard	202/636-3000	District	202/737-8181 202/347-5072
Metropolitan desk	202/636-3181	Virginia	
Features desk	202/636-3227	Alexandria	703/836-9111
Society	202/636-3234	Arlington	703/522-7644
Calendar listings	202/636-3230	Fairfax	703/803-3552
Obituaries	202/636-3181	Richmond	1/804/788-4251
Fax — Metro news	202/632-0559	Maryland	
Fax — Features	202/632-2235	Prince George's	301/627-1644
		Montgomery	301/279-5675
		Annapolis	301/858-6555 1/410/268-6558

Write now

Want to sound off on local affairs? Send your opinion to Metropolitan Voices, The Washington Times, 3600 New York Ave. NE, Washington, D.C. 20002. Or you can fax us at 202/832-0659.