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Governor lobbied for helicopters

Schaefer says there is no money

By BRIAN BLOMQUIST
Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — Several Eastern Shore leaders are lobbying Gov. William Donald Schaefer to put money in the state budget for the purchase of two new helicopters for MedEvac bases on the Upper Eastern Shore and in Southern Maryland.

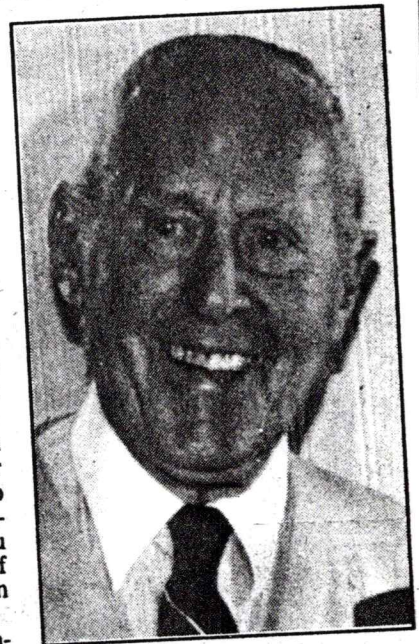
But Schaefer said Friday there isn't enough money to replace the MedEvac helicopters, which the state considers too old to fly at night.

Comptroller Louis Goldstein urged in a letter to the governor last week that the state buy two new helicopters. "I would consider it a personal favor if you included funds" for the purpose of buying the helicopters, Goldstein wrote.

Goldstein, who is superintendent of the state's fiscal affairs, enclosed documents showing the state has an unallocated balance of \$18.3 million in an emergency medical services fund — enough money to buy two new helicopters.

However, Schaefer aide Paul Schurick said the \$18 million balance is being used to fund existing services. "The money is simply not there," Schurick said. "At this point, we do not have the funds to buy the helicopters."

On Thursday, Sen. Frederick C. Malkus Jr., D-Mid-Shore, sent the governor a letter similar to Goldstein's. "I told him we needed a helicopter down here, and they



LOUIS GOLDSTEIN
... favors purchase

need one in Southern Maryland," Malkus said. "They have the money. He should put it in the budget."

Last week, the eight-member Southern Maryland delegation wrote the governor to request money for new helicopters.

And on Friday, several Eastern Shore members of the governor's "citizen cabinet" — including Will Howard of Easton and JOK. Walsh of Denton — brought the governor two dozen letters

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Lobby

from Shore leaders, each expressing the need for a new helicopter.

Schaefer told Howard he would read the letters but said the state doesn't have the money to buy new helicopters.

"I wasn't encouraged by what I heard," Howard said. "I'm very disappointed."

The Centreville MedEvac base is now equipped with a Bell Jet Ranger helicopter, which the state has prohibited from flying at night or in bad weather since 1991. Six other MedEvac bases across Maryland have modern Dauphin helicopters, which are allowed to fly at night.

As a result, trauma patients on the Upper Shore often must rely on emergency helicopters from MedEvac bases in Salisbury and Baltimore if an accident occurs after dark.

In Southern Maryland, where the MedEvac base also has an older helicopter, patients often rely on emergency helicopters from Salisbury and Andrews Air Force Base. The University of Maryland Shock Trauma Center is in Baltimore.

In Southern Maryland, helicopter rescues were attributed to the successful rescues of dozens of passengers on the El Toro II fishing boat, which sank in a storm on Dec. 5. Four people died in the Potomac River accident, which occurred in daytime, and Goldstein said more people would have drowned had it not been for the helicopter rescues.

Two years ago, Schaefer told members of the Maryland Executive Helicopter Advisory Committee (MEHAC) that the people of the Upper Eastern Shore and Southern Maryland need new helicopters at their MedEvac bases.

But since then, the state has been hampered by budget deficits, and Schaefer has not earmarked money for new helicopters in his budgets. Schaefer has since disbanded MEHAC and replaced it with a new committee.

The governor has asked the new committee to study whether Southern Maryland and the Upper Eastern Shore need new helicopters, even though MEHAC concluded in a 1991 report that the two bases needed new helicopters.

"A recommendation of two years ago from a committee that doesn't exist any longer is incidental," said Schurick.

The cost of two new helicopters was about \$11 million when the state last looked into buying them in 1991.

The state's emergency medical fund was created with car-registration surcharges of \$8. When the state allowed people to register their cars for two-year periods, beginning in 1993, a one-time windfall was generated. The surplus now stands at \$18 million, and there is some dispute about how the excess money should be spent.

The governor's office says the

balance is being used to fund existing operations, which exceed annual collections from the surcharge.

"That was the intent of the fund, to make the system self-sufficient," Schurick said.

"I'm concerned about spending the money on helicopters and being short next year," said Budget and Fiscal Planning Deputy Secretary Frederick W. Puddester, who predicted the fund would be depleted by 1999 even if no helicopters are bought.

Goldstein and others disagree. They say the money is supposed to be used to enhance the existing system.

Del. Robert Thornton, D-37-Caroline, who served on the committee that approved the \$8 surcharge, said one of the understood purposes of the fund was to buy new helicopters for Southern Maryland and the Eastern Shore.

"I asked David Iannucci (Schaefer's chief legislative officer) at that time if the \$8 fee would be enough to get new helicopters?" Thornton said. "And he said as soon as they got the money, they would lease or purchase the helicopters. Well they've got the money."

"The money's sitting there, and it's more than enough for those helicopters," said Rep. Wayne T. Gilchrest, R-Md.-1st, the Eastern Shore congressman who called the governor's office Thursday about the helicopter issue.

Rep. Steny Hoyer, D-Md.-5th, also has asked Schaefer to buy new helicopters. Hoyer is Southern Maryland's congressman.

"I'm amazed at this," said Del. Kenneth Schisler, R-37th-Easton, who wrote the governor a letter Friday. "It was our understanding that when we had money in the fund, the governor would put helicopters in the budget."

Schisler called the acquisition of new helicopters "my most important legislative priority for 1994."

Del. Timothy Maloney, D-Prince George's, who chairs a House subcommittee that determines funding levels for the MedEvac program, said there was never any specific intention of what to do with surplus money in the emergency fund, as long as the money was spent on emergency services. Maloney said the state could buy helicopters with the money. "It depends on need and cost," he said.

Shore leaders say the need for a new helicopter is grave.

"We're in greater jeopardy than other citizens of the state," said Federalsburg Town Manager Richard Colburn in a letter to the governor on Thursday.

Colburn noted that the MedEvac helicopters based at Baltimore and Salisbury are usually busy in the summer, when the state's two most populous cities are Baltimore and Ocean City. That makes summer-night accidents even more perilous on the Upper Shore, Colburn said.

Schaefer currently is working on the state's 1995 budget, which will be presented to lawmakers in the next few weeks. The General Assembly is allowed to cut the governor's budget but cannot add to it.

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Cecil Whig
Elkton, Md.

FEB 18 1994

Southern Maryland to get new medevac *Helicopter for Eastern Shore to come later*

By Brian Blomquist

Whig Correspondent

ANNAPOLIS — Cecil County may have to wait until September to be covered by its own state-of-the-art medevac helicopter, Governor William Donald Schaefer said Thursday.

The Maryland Board of Public Works voted unanimously Wednesday to purchase an emergency helicopter for the medevac base in Southern Maryland.

The board will vote to purchase an emergency helicopter for the medevac base on the Eastern Shore soon, Gov. William Donald Schaefer said in an interview Thursday.

Schaefer said Eastern Shore residents should not despair because Southern Maryland is getting the first available helicopter, a used model from Florida.

"They don't have to worry," Schaefer said. "We're going to do it. What are they anxious

for? We're going to get it done. We're going to get it done before I leave here."

The governor said Southern Maryland's medevac base received first approval for a modern helicopter because the region needs it more.

"We had more pressure coming from one area than the other," Schaefer said. "There was heavy pressure from Southern Maryland, especially recently. From the Eastern Shore, there was some steady pressure, but it was not like Southern Maryland."

"The other reason we decided to buy the Southern Maryland helicopter first is because the area needs it more," Schaefer said. "They're expanding down there. They're just booming with activity."

But Schaefer insisted that statewide medevac service will remain "inadequate" until the Eastern Shore and

Southern Maryland medevac bases get modern emergency helicopters.

The two bases now use older Bell Jet Ranger helicopters, which the state won't allow to fly at night or in bad weather. All six other medevac bases in Maryland have modern Dauphin helicopters — which are faster, able to carry more weight, and easier to fly in bad weather.

Getting two Dauphin helicopters for Southern Maryland and the Eastern Shore, Schaefer said, "will complete the emergency system. The golden hour will reach to all the (state's) borders."

Paramedics say a trauma patient's chance of survival is greatly increased if the patient can be transported to the trauma center within one hour of the accident. In Maryland, the state trauma center is in Baltimore.

The three-member Board of Public Works, which includes the governor, state com-

ptroller Louis Goldstein, and state treasurer Lucille Maurer, gives final approval to state purchases of most capital items.

The board gave the state police permission to spend \$4 million on a helicopter for Southern Maryland. A new helicopter for the Eastern Shore is expected to cost between \$5.7 million and \$6 million.

After Wednesday's vote Schaefer instructed the state police to send a team of pilots to Florida to inspect a used Dauphin helicopter available there. The team is scheduled to make the trip this weekend.

After the glitches and negotiations are worked out, the state police has permission to buy the helicopter and bring it back to the Southern Maryland medevac base in St. Mary's County. The governor's office expects the deal to take less than six weeks.

Capital MDNR
Annapolis, Md.

MAR 31 1994

Medevacs purchase approved

By HEATHER M. IARUSSO
Staff Writer

The state Board of Public Works yesterday approved the \$10.5 million purchase of two state-of-the-art medevac helicopters for the Upper Eastern Shore and Southern Maryland.

The faster, more sophisticated dual-engine machines will replace older helicopters stationed at St. Mary's Airport by the end of September and at Centreville by the end of November.

The new aircraft have long been sought by state police to standardize statewide medical evacuation operations. They will allow helicopters stationed on the Western Shore to spend more time handling emergencies west of the Chesapeake Bay.

The acquisitions boost to 11 the number of the French-made Dauphin helicopters and complete the phaseout of Bell Jet Rangers, single-engine aircraft that cannot fly at night or in bad weather.

"This is a great day," said Col. Larry Tolliver, state police superintendent.

"The Dauphin is a much better aircraft," said Lt. Gary Shields, the police Aviation Division's head of training and recruitment. "If one engine quits, the other one will maintain flight and is able to climb. If the Bell Jet engine quits, it's going down."

"In about 45 seconds ... whatever is below you, that's where you're going."

Since the state began medevac operations in 1970, three paramedics and three pilots have died when their Jet Rangers crashed. Lt. Shields said no state police Dauphin has ever gone down.

According to state police, the helicopter fleet has flown more than 50,000 patients to various hospitals.

Del. Ronald Franks, R-Queenstown, said he was pleased the board approved the helicopters because residents on the Upper Eastern Shore who need quick, safe transportation won't have to wait for a Dauphin to arrive from Salisbury or Baltimore.

The helicopters will be funded from the Transportation Trust and Emergency Medical Services funds.

The state considered buying a used helicopter to stay under a \$10 million ceiling. But Col. Tolliver said the new helicopters will cost only \$10.5 million and will carry a full warranty instead of the shorter guarantee available on the used helicopter.

"The warranty is very important," he said.

The used helicopters would also cost about \$500,000 to update.

It costs \$494 an hour to operate a Dauphin and \$125 an hour for a Bell Jet Ranger, not including the two-member crew's salary.

The state police plan to hire six civilian pilots and transfer five paramedics to the Aviation Division to increase the coverage in Centreville and St. Mary's County from 16 to 20 hours.

Queen Anne's County is waiting for the General Assembly to pass a bond bill funding \$75,000 of the projected \$120,000 needed to renovate the Centreville hangar so it can accommodate the bigger Dauphin. Queen Anne's, which owns the hangar, will pay part of the difference and has asked surrounding counties to pitch in.

"We're all ready to get going on the building as soon as the money is funded," said Queen Anne's Commissioner Oscar "Sonny" Schulz.

APR 06 1994

State purchases MedEvac helicopter for Shore

BY BRIAN BLOMQUIST
Annapolis Bureau

ANNAPOLIS — The state government last week bought two modern emergency helicopters for MedEvac bases in Centreville and St. Mary's County.

The cost was \$10.5 million, and the sale was unanimously approved by the Maryland Board of Public Works.

The manufacturer of the two Dauphin-brand helicopters, American Eurocopter of Texas, says the first helicopter will arrive in Southern Maryland in September. The second helicopter will be transported to Centreville by the end of November.

Meanwhile, pilots and paramedics at the two emergency bases will train to fly the faster, more sophisticated helicopters. Ultimately, three more pilots and two more paramedics will be needed at the Centreville base, which serves most of the Upper Eastern Shore.

Currently, the state police troopers at the two MedEvac bases are flying single-engine Bell Jet Ranger helicopters — one nearly 20 years old.

Perhaps most critically, all the Bell Jet Ranger helicopters lack automated flying systems, which can be used when visibility deteriorates.

"When you're flying at night, it's hard to tell if you're flying into a cloud," said Lt. Gary Shields, who has flown both kinds of helicopters for the Maryland State Police Aviation Division.

The Dauphin helicopters are not only faster with their twin-engines, they are equipped with computers that can take over controls when visibility is low.

"In a Dauphin, a pilot can let go of the controls and the helicopter will fly itself," Shields said.

After 1986, when a MedEvac helicopter ran into cloud trouble and crashed in Western Maryland and two troopers died, the state made a commitment to purchase modern helicopters for the MedEvac system. By 1990, the state had bought nine French-made Dauphin helicopters for six MedEvac bases around Maryland. Three helicopters were kept at Martin State Airport in Baltimore for maintenance and training.

Two MedEvac bases, however, never received Dauphin helicopters, despite the promises of Gov. William Donald Schaefer and members of the governor's helicopter advisory panel. Older Bell Jet Ranger helicopters remained at MedEvac bases in Centreville and St. Mary's County.

Because the Jet Rangers were considered unsafe at night, the state prohibited the helicopters from flying after sundown in 1991. As a result, helicopters from other MedEvac bases have to be relied on when traumatic accidents occurred in Southern Maryland and on the Upper

Eastern Shore after dark.

When the two MedEvac bases receive new helicopters later this year, the bases will be open 20 hours a day.

"They will gel with the rest of the fleet," said Maryland State Police Superintendent Larry Tolliver. "And having them will relieve some pressure from the other bases."

The one drawback is the cost.

Dauphin helicopters are more expensive than Bell Jet Rangers. They require more staff. Parts are more expensive. And they are more expensive to fly. It costs \$494 to keep a Dauphin in the air for one hour, compared to \$125 for a Bell Jet Ranger, according to Shields.

Nonetheless, Tolliver said it came down to a "safety issue and a fiscal issue."

Schaefer said the state "did the right thing going for new helicopters for both bases."

The Board of Public Works approved the purchase of the helicopters from American Eurocopter without requiring bids.

The money will come from the state Transportation Trust Fund (\$6.5 million) and the Emergency Medical Services Fund (\$4 million).

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Recorder
Pr. Fred., Md.

AUG 31 1994

Southern Maryland to get new MedEvac helicopter on Sept. 23

Brian Blomquist
Special to The Recorder

The state has tentatively planned to bring Southern Maryland its new MedEvac helicopter Sept. 23 and the Eastern Shore its new helicopter Nov. 4.

Maj. John Hughes, commander of the aviation division of the Maryland State Police, said planners are working with schedulers

for Gov. William D. Schaefer to arrange the dedication ceremonies of the helicopters.

This spring, the state bought two modern Dauphin emergency helicopters for \$10.5 million to replace the aging Bell Jet Ranger helicopters based at MedEvac sites in St. Mary's County and Centreville.

The MedEvac bases at St. Mary's County Airport and Centreville are the only two emergency evacuation bases in the state

with the older Bell Jet Ranger helicopters. The state considers them unsafe to fly at night.

Hughes said the twin-engine Dauphin helicopters are still with the manufacturer, American Eurocopter in Grand Prairie, Texas, where they are being fitted for medical use. He said the state has already hired six additional pilots for the two new helicopters.

Additional pilots are needed because the Dauphin helicopters will

be in use at night. The Bell Jet Rangers were prohibited by the state to be flown at night in 1991.

Hughes said the existing Bell Jet Ranger helicopters will be kept by the state police and used for criminal surveillance and marijuana eradication.

Hughes said the Bell Jets are less expensive to fly. They cost \$150 an hour compared to \$500 an hour to operate the Dauphin helicopters.

Md. Independent
Waldorf, Md.

AUG 10 1994

Southern Maryland should have MedEvac helicopter by Sept. 23

By BRIAN BLOMQUIST
Independent Staff Writer

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Hughes said the Bell Jets are less expensive to fly. They cost \$150 an hour compared to \$500 an hour to operate the Dauphin helicopters. "The Dauphins are noisier and not as efficient for surveillance," Hughes said. "The Bell Jets don't stand out as much as the Dauphins."