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Big role is seen for Brown

O'Malley pledges running mate will have major impact on policy

By Doug Donovan
Sun reporter

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MITCHELLVILLE -- Advancing the early momentum of his bid for Maryland governor, Baltimore Mayor Martin O'Malley officially named Del. Anthony G. Brown as his running mate yesterday and pledged to entrust the Prince George's County lawmaker with a leading role in crafting policy positions for the campaign and, if they win, the state.

The Democratic mayor introduced Brown yesterday morning before nearly 250 supporters at the Newton White Mansion here in the delegate's hometown. The candidates, dubbed the "dynamic duo" by former Gov. Harry R. Hughes, then embarked on a one-day, nearly 190-mile trek to campaign stops in Frederick and Hagerstown before returning to Baltimore for a fundraiser.

Along the way, O'Malley spelled out the role he envisions for a lieutenant governor, saying he wants Brown to take the lead on four issues: reducing college tuition, boosting job creation, extending health care to more families and establishing homeland security policies that incorporate the state National Guard. The two also discussed in an interview their positions on such issues as slots and the death penalty.

"I foresee [Brown] being very involved in every aspect in moving this administration's legislative agenda forward," O'Malley said. "I surround myself with people who are very empowered. The smarter they are the more power we get from them."

O'Malley and Brown focused most of their public comments yesterday on education issues, including college tuition and construction money for public schools. Today, they are set to announce in Annapolis a plan to boost state spending on school construction, an issue the mayor addressed last week by unveiling a \$75 million fund to help Baltimore public school facilities.

Brown did not take long to take on the traditional aggressive role of a lieutenant governor candidate by blaming Republican Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. for increases in college tuition.

"For the last three years, our governor has closed the door of opportunity in higher education to many in our state," he said. "When we're elected, Martin O'Malley and I pledge to reopen them."

Brown, 44, who entered the General Assembly in 1999, said he is qualified to lead such an issue because he was a trustee for Prince George's County Community College from 1995 to 1999. He also has served on the House of Delegates' "special committee on higher education."

He said his position on the Economic Matters Committee and a health insurance subcommittee, provided skills he needs to garner support for health care and economic development legislation. As a lieutenant colonel in the Army Reserve who recently returned from a tour in Iraq, Brown said he also can lead on homeland security, an issue on which O'Malley has

established a reputation.

O'Malley, 42, praised Brown's ability as majority whip in the House of Delegates to forge consensus and compromise among lawmakers. O'Malley said such talents are "sorely needed" in a government that he said is bogged down in Ehrlich's "Washington-style gridlock."

The candidates said Ehrlich's rejection of compromise on slot machine and medical malpractice were glaring examples of gridlock.

Ehrlich spokesman Henry Fawell said O'Malley's criticism is misplaced, considering the state has gone from a projected \$4 billion shortfall three years ago to a projected \$1.7 billion surplus. "That doesn't take place without extraordinary leadership," Fawell said.

He added that the University System of Maryland Board of Regents, not the governor, has the authority to raise tuition. Fawell said Ehrlich has increased state funding to higher education by \$47 million over three years.

Democratic Party officials acknowledge the recent funding increases, but note that they came after a \$54 million cut to higher education in Ehrlich's first spending plan. Tuition at the University of Maryland, College Park has increased 51.5 percent since fiscal year 2002, two years before Ehrlich's administration, and the systemwide average increase in that time has been 44.6 percent.

Ehrlich's early cuts were needed to curb pending shortfalls and he has since increased by 55 percent funds for need-based scholarships, Fawell said.

He said the governor did not compromise on Democratic ideas on slot machines and medical malpractice because they required tax increases. "If Mayor O'Malley is accusing the governor of not compromising on tax increases then he's right," Fawell said.

As O'Malley and Brown traveled to four events yesterday, they pushed a message of helping working families - hoping to persuade Democrats to support the mayor's ticket over his Democratic competitor, Montgomery County Executive Douglas M. Duncan.

Duncan is expected to announce his running mate in a few weeks. Democrats who greeted O'Malley and Brown in Mitchellville and Frederick said the viability of Duncan's campaign hinges on the pick and on his ability to show strong fundraising next month when campaign finance reports are due.

Sue Hecht, first vice chairwoman of the state Democratic Party, said she was excited about the O'Malley-Brown ticket, but that she expects to be enthusiastic about Duncan's ticket, too.

Duncan's campaign reiterated a statement it issued last week when the Brown pick was made public. In it, campaign manager Scott Arceneaux said Duncan respects Brown, but that the race is ultimately about Duncan and O'Malley.

The statement noted that Brown has been an opponent of slots, a subtle reminder that O'Malley's stance is different. The mayor has supported a limited number of the machines at racetracks and has said he does not support them to make up for budget shortfalls.

Brown said he and O'Malley agree that slots are "not a way to move Maryland forward."

O'Malley said that he does not expect to agree with Brown on every issue. But the two, traveling in a van along Interstate 70, meshed on the death penalty: "Life in prison without parole," O'Malley said, stating their preference. Under Ehrlich's administration, the state has executed two criminals as the governor has rejected the anti-death penalty stance of Lt. Gov. Michael S. Steele.

Despite what some Democrats and political observers say is O'Malley's early momentum and a significant lead in some polls, the mayor says he is determined not to let up on the daily calls he makes to raise money - running back-and-forth between his City Hall office and downtown campaign headquarters.

As a legislator, Brown is prohibited from raising money during the 90-day session, but O'Malley is not. The mayor hopes that Brown will be a spokesman for their ideas in Annapolis.

"Especially since only one of us can be on the phone raising money, the other one is going to be pulling together the policy

cars of this train," O'Malley said.

doug.donovan@baltsun.com

Sun reporter Andrew A. Green contributed to this article.

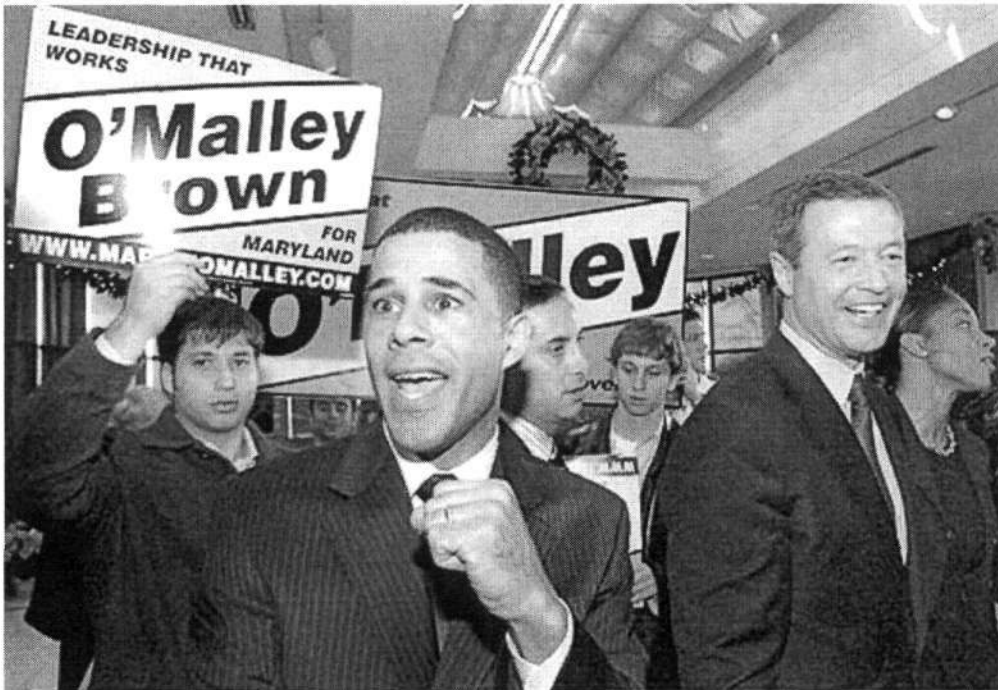
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→ Anthony G. Brown (left) and Baltimore Mayor Martin O'Malley greet supporters in Mitchellville, Brown's hometown, after the Prince George's County delegate was named O'Malley's running mate in his bid for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination.

(Sun photo by Amy Davis) Dec 12, 2005

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