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HEADLINE: It's Ehrlich's big day

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BODY:

Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. took office today as the state's first Republican governor in 36 years, pledging to help the working poor and crack down on career criminals.

Repeating a campaign theme, Mr. Ehrlich said a distinction needs to be made between repeat criminals, juveniles and drug offenders.

"Our streets and communities must be made safer - or we will not thrive!" Mr. Ehrlich's said in a copy of his inaugural speech released before the noon ceremony at the State House. "At the same time, we must stop giving up on young people trapped by drug abuse and despair. We can shut the revolving door of recidivism and open the door of hope and opportunity for all people."

Mr. Ehrlich promised that he would "open the privileges" of the governor's office to faith-based groups and individuals who "devote themselves to the performance of good deeds."

Mr. Ehrlich chose Jack Kemp, a former New York congressman and prominent national Republican leader, to welcome guests and lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

Shut out of the state's top post for more than three decades, Republicans this morning were downright joyful.

Spectators showed their Republican pride with buttons or other GOP-themed paraphernalia. Those who didn't bring any could stop by a tent set up around Bladen Street, where business was brisk.

In the House of Delegates lounge this morning, Del. James Rzepkowski, R-Glen Burnie, said he was happy enough to "break out in song."

"It's Independence Day for a lot of us," he said. "Democrats always said it would be a cold day in Annapolis before we saw a Republican governor. It's a cold day in Annapolis."

Two other events were scheduled in Annapolis today - a parade following the speeches and a reception at the Governor's Mansion.

Along Route 50 outside Annapolis, traffic already was backing up before 8 a.m., said Sgt. Jay Gulley of the state police barrack in the city.

"It's going to be worse than that," he said, predicting backups and slowdowns to the Prince George's County line as

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the inauguration grew closer.

With the temperatures only reaching 28 degrees by 10 a.m., most people waited until closer to noon to grab a seat for the big event. Traffic downtown was still moving fairly smoothly two hours before the ceremony, but College Avenue was likely to be cordoned before the event started.

Lots of activity

That didn't mean State Circle was dormant. A school choir started singing around 9:30 near the main podium. Television cameras occupied two stages nearby, and satellite trucks were parked all along North Street.

Police from all levels - city, state police, Department of General Services and even the military - monitored the grounds.

One police officer patrolled the State House grounds with the help of a German shepherd. A General Services Police car sat at the intersection of Rowe and Calvert streets.

Michael Steele, the first African-American to serve as lieutenant governor, also was sworn in today - the birthday of the Rev. Martin Luther King.

"You personify the principles of hope, determination, and opportunity to which Dr. King devoted his life," Mr. Ehrlich told him in his speech. "What a remarkable and historic day for our state."

Mr. Steele, also scheduled to address the inauguration crowd, told legislators this week that the moment of truth has arrived for the Ehrlich-Steele administration.

"It's not just about elections any more, it's about a job well done, and we need to be held accountable," Mr. Steele told legislators.

What lies ahead

The first day of that accountability will come Friday when the new administration will submit its first budget which must address a projected \$1.7 billion deficit.

Because Mr. Ehrlich has promised not to raise sales or income taxes, legislators wonder whose programs will be slashed to close the gap.

"It is nice to be conciliatory, but if he cuts county budgets, some people are going to disagree," said Speaker of the House Michael E. Busch, D-Annapolis.

"Funding through taxes should be part of the debate. You shouldn't take off the table these other options."

Sen. Philip C. Jimeno, D-Brooklyn Park, said that with a Republican governor in office, GOP legislators will be forced to take a more active role in solving problems such as the budget deficit.

One such Republican, Del. David G. Boschert, R-Crownsville and vice chairman of the county delegation, said today's festive mood could pass quickly.

"It's going to be an enjoyable day," Mr. Boschert said. "But on Friday, Maryland is going to come face to face with reality."

Mr. Rzepkowski was one of few local legislators who thought a period of harmony could last.

Mr. Rzepkowski said that based on briefings by the administration, he expects Mr. Ehrlich to increase spending on

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care for groups such as the developmentally disabled.

"Groups that traditionally would be nervous about a Republican governor will be relieved: This is a 'people-first' budget," Mr. Rzepkowski said.

Farwell to Parris

While Mr. Ehrlich was preparing to take the reins of power, Gov. Parris N. Glendening was winding down his political career.

Chuck Porcari, spokesman for the outgoing governor, said Mr. Glendening would leave the State House after Mr. Ehrlich took the oath of office but before he delivered his inaugural address.

Mr. Glendening spent yesterday cleaning out his desk, signing autographs and hearing some last-minute appeals that he sign pardons or commute sentences for convicted criminals.

He said he turned down about a dozen requests the last day.

"I don't believe in midnight pardons," Mr. Glendening said.

Sitting at his desk late yesterday surrounded by bare walls previously covered with photographs and awards from his career, Mr. Glendening said it had been "kind of a warm and fuzzy day."

He said before clearing out for good, he planned to leave a note on his desk for Mr. Ehrlich wishing him well.

His one piece of advice for his successor on inaugural day was to "take a lot of pictures because you're not going to remember any of this. The next several weeks will be a blur."---

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