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HEADLINE: In Md., a Two-Party Era Begins;
First GOP Governor in 34 Years Urges Assembly to Work With Him

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BODY:

Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. vowed to shape a smaller but more compassionate government yesterday as he was inaugurated as Maryland's 60th governor and the first Republican to hold the state's highest office in more than three decades.

On a biting cold but brilliant afternoon, the 45-year-old son of a car salesman from suburban Baltimore called on the Democrats who control the General Assembly to work with him "in the best interests of the people" to resolve a record \$ 1.7 billion gap between estimated revenue and projected state spending.

"We're going to ask government to do what thousands of Maryland families do every day: live within its means," Ehrlich said in his inaugural address. "We should not be fearful of change, of reform, of better ideas, particularly where taxpayer dollars are concerned."

On the opposite side of the podium stood Ehrlich's running mate, Lt. Gov. Michael S. Steele, the first African American to be elected to statewide office since Maryland was founded as a colony in 1632. In his speech, Steele, the 44-year-old son of a District laundress, noted that his inauguration happened to fall on the birthday of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

"Nearly 40 years ago, Martin Luther King had a dream that all our children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character," Steele said. "How fitting that today we celebrate not only the inauguration of a new era for Maryland but the birthday of a man who dreamt this day would come."

The speeches were delivered from a platform erected on the steps of the State House in Annapolis. U.S. and Maryland flags the size of billboards were draped across the building's facade. Nearly 2,000 jubilant Republicans and

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others shared the plaza with about 75 people loudly protesting the death penalty. Ehrlich has vowed to lift a moratorium on executions in effect since May.

The ceremony was the highlight of a long day of festivities that kicked off at noon, when Chief Judge Robert Bell delivered the official oath of office to Ehrlich and Steele in the Senate chamber, a performance repeated afterward on the outdoor platform.

There followed a bagpipe procession to a heated tent, where Ehrlich, Steele and their families watched a parade of marching bands along State Circle. Then it was on to an open house at the governor's mansion and two inaugural balls in Baltimore, part of \$ 1.6 million in festivities that made Ehrlich's privately funded inauguration what was believed to be the most expensive in state history.

Ehrlich, a former congressman, had hoped to draw such Washington luminaries as Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld and House Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R-Tex.). Instead, he had former U.S. housing secretary Jack Kemp, who welcomed the crowd, and a greeting from President Bush delivered by his political director, Ken Mehlman, a Maryland native.

In a 12-minute speech studded with jokes and private asides, the new governor focused mainly on the events of his life: his birth to working-class parents who still live in an Arbutus rowhouse, his successful high school football career, his scholarship to Princeton, his election as a state lawmaker and congressman and, last fall, his election as governor.

"We like our new house -- thank you," Ehrlich said as he took the podium. He shot a glance toward the red-brick Government House, where he and his wife, Kendel, awoke yesterday morning for the first time.

"Kendel wanted to return the key this morning, but I told her: 'No, it's not a hotel, dear. This is where we live,' " Ehrlich joked.

There followed a cavalcade of thank-yous. To Ehrlich's parents, Nancy and Bob Sr., whom he praised for their "unconditional love." To his wife, whom he summoned to the podium, kissed twice and thanked for her "complete faith and confidence."

Ehrlich even thanked his 3-year-old son, Drew, for teaching him "what really matters in life." Drew, looking sleepy in jeans and a blue parka, buried his face in his mother's shoulder and offered the crowd a tiny thumbs up.

Ehrlich thanked his Democratic gubernatorial opponent, Lt. Gov. Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, who skipped the official swearing-in at noon in the Senate chamber but appeared for the speeches afterward looking cozy in a long, red suede coat.

"Lieutenant Governor Townsend -- boy, I'm so proud you're here today," Ehrlich said, dashing to Townsend's seat to deliver a quick kiss. Introduced by the master of ceremonies as the person "who represents the integrity of the last eight years," Townsend offered a smile but took her leave quickly when the ceremony ended.

Ehrlich also thanked several past governors, including Comptroller William Donald Schaefer (D), who introduced him yesterday; Harry R. Hughes (D); and Marvin Mandel (D), who sat behind him on the inaugural platform.

The notable exception was Parris N. Glendening (D), who became a private citizen at noon yesterday after 30 years in politics and eight years as governor.

In prepared remarks, Ehrlich thanked Glendening for his "strong commitment to the environment and excellence in higher education," but Ehrlich skipped right over that line during his delivery.

Glendening attended Ehrlich's official swearing-in, joining a crowd of Democratic officeholders in the Senate chamber. But he declined an invitation to the outdoor ceremony, saying the focus should be on Ehrlich.

Instead, Glendening chatted with reporters about his career plans, saying he has signed one contract for a job in the environmental field and is about to sign another. Then he left the State House to help his wife unpack at their leased townhouse on the waterfront in Annapolis.

Though Ehrlich's inauguration ended 34 years of Democratic dominance in Maryland -- and though he is replacing one of the most liberal governors in the nation -- Ehrlich said little about policy.

He repeated campaign pledges to provide more drug treatment to the addicted, more access to those with disabilities and more health coverage for the "working poor." He promised to "open the privileges of the governor's office" to "organizations and those individuals of faith who devote themselves to the performance of good deeds." He vowed to support public education, saying that "a quality education guarantees an even playing field for all Marylanders."

And he said he would slash state spending, which has grown by more than 60 percent since Glendening took office, to nearly \$ 22 billion a year.

"There will be honest disagreements where spending priorities are concerned, but good and honest and hardworking people can overcome their differences in the best interests of the people," Ehrlich said. ". . . Now, let's get down to work -- together."

State Sen. Thomas McLain Middleton (D-Charles), chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, said he was struck by Ehrlich's admonishment that state government must "live within its means," given his advocacy for legalized gambling. Ehrlich has proposed raising \$ 800 million a year to balance the budget by allowing Maryland's horse racing tracks to operate an estimated 10,000 slot machines.

"Maybe I'm being too critical," Middleton said, "but it just doesn't back up where he is on slot machines. If he's saying you've got to live within your means, why are you resorting to gambling?"

Del. Carol S. Petzold (D-Montgomery) noted that Ehrlich's four-page speech, written more than a month ago in a single late-night session, included only one page of policy. "The speech was very good in terms of thanking. In terms of meat on what he's going to do in the future . . . it was very sketchy," Petzold said.

Republicans seemed not to notice.

"It's a great day for the people of Maryland and a great day for the country that Maryland is finally joining the world and becoming a two-party state," said Republican Helen Delich Bentley, who lost a bid last fall to replace Ehrlich in Congress.

Even some Democrats were moved by yesterday's ceremony. After Bell, the first African American chief judge in Maryland's history, delivered the oath to Steele, two black Democratic senators, Gloria G. Lawlah (Prince George's) and Nathaniel J. McFadden (Baltimore), exchanged big smiles and a high-five.

After the inauguration, the celebration went to the streets of downtown Annapolis. More than a dozen high school bands from across the state joined in a parade, saluting the governor and first lady with patriotic songs such as "God Bless America."

Then it was on to Government House for the open house, where Ehrlich, Steele and their families greeted well-wishers with handshakes and back slaps.

Last night, about 6,000 supporters in ball gowns and black tie partied at two inaugural galas. The \$ 100 tickets were so hot in recent weeks that planners had to add a gala at Camden Yards after the event at the Baltimore Convention Center sold out.

The dance floor in the convention center's ballroom filled early and stayed that way. "We're very, very excited Maryland has a Republican governor," said Jackie Navin, a psychologist from Harford County. "You kind of feel you're part of something big."

After visiting the Camden Yards party, Ehrlich arrived at the convention center about 10:30 p.m. and danced with his wife to "Under the Boardwalk."

At the end of day, the only inaugural formality left to be decided was how the new governor would like to be addressed.

"Governor!" Kendel Ehrlich said firmly.

Ehrlich shrugged.

"Bob," he said.

Staff writers Jo Becker, Hamil R. Harris, Nelson Hernandez, Anita Huslin, David Montgomery, Vikki Ortiz and Craig Whitlock contributed to this report.

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