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In inaugural address, new governor vows fight for taxpayer interests;

Speech short on specifics;

Lt. Gov. Steele sworn in as 1st African-American statewide-elected official;

THE INAUGURATION OF ROBERT L. EHRLICH JR.

BYLINE: David Nitkin

SOURCE: SUN STAFF

BODY:

Robert Leroy Ehrlich Jr. was sworn in as Maryland's 60th governor yesterday, pledging that the first Republican administration in more than three decades would combat drug addiction, improve the lives of disabled residents and boost public school performance.

In a 12-minute inaugural address delivered in subfreezing temperatures, Ehrlich, 45, thanked his family, classmates, football teammates and legislative colleagues for building a foundation of principle and passion that carried him from the working-class suburb of Arbutus to the State House.

His speech offered more promises than specifics but touched on nagging problems - in particular, the state's budget shortfall - that have become his full-time responsibility.

"We should not be fearful of change, of reform, of better ideas, particularly where taxpayer dollars are concerned," said the former four-term congressman. "For us, every day is a taxpayer day, every dollar is a taxpayer dollar, every minute is a taxpayer minute."

Ehrlich said he would also concentrate on homeland security, public safety and faith-based initiatives, and he called for bipartisan cooperation to solve the state's problems.

"There will be honest disagreements where spending priorities are concerned, but good and honest and hard-working people can overcome their differences in the best interests of the people," he said.

During a ceremony driven by tradition but sprinkled with humor, Ehrlich suffered good-natured barbs from Comptroller William Donald Schaefer and embraced his parents, his wife and his running mate, Lt. Gov. Michael S. Steele, in unbridled displays of affection. The 1,200 outdoor seats were filled, and hundreds more watched and shivered in the shadow of the State House.

Steele, 44, becomes the state's first African-American statewide-elected official, an achievement mentioned often

yesterday - the birthday of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

"The courage and sacrifices of previous generations have built the ladder I climb to reach this platform today," Steele said. "Governor Ehrlich and I called it the ladder to opportunity. And today, the opportunity ticket has climbed that ladder together, to the precipice of Maryland state government."
'I'm on cloud nine'

Steele and Ehrlich took their formal oaths of office shortly before noon inside the state Senate chambers, filled to overflowing with members of the House of Delegates, Court of Appeals judges and family members. Friends jammed the small balconies, providing a minute-long ovation when each of the two men entered.

As Robert M. Bell, chief judge of the state Court of Appeals, administered the pledge, Ehrlich smiled broadly and the eyes of his father welled with tears.

"I'm on cloud nine," Robert L. Ehrlich Sr., a former car salesman, said later. "We lived and died for that kid."

Instantly, the machinery of government lurched from one administration to the next. The Web sites of state agencies posted Ehrlich's name at noon. Highway maps bearing the new governor's photograph were ready for distribution.

But it took time for the change to sink in among the state's political leaders, most of whom are Democrats. When Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller asked that the families of the "governor-elect" and "lieutenant governor-elect" be escorted out after the ceremonies, he was pummeled with catcalls for using the wrong titles.

"What a difference two minutes makes," Miller said.

Departing Gov. Parris N. Glendening attended the Senate swearing-in but skipped a second, longer ceremony held outdoors in public view - causing Ehrlich to remove Glendening's name from his prepared remarks as he thanked the state's three other living ex-governors who were on stage: Schaefer, Harry R. Hughes and Marvin Mandel.

Glendening said he felt little emotion as he watched a successor take office, though Ehrlich defeated his hand-picked successor, former Lt. Gov. Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, in a come-from-behind campaign.

"In some ways, you prepare for it the day you walk in," said Glendening, adding that he left Ehrlich a note on the governor's desk that urged him to have fun and set aside time for his family.

Several speakers yesterday made veiled references to Glendening's personal problems - considered an important element in Ehrlich's win.

Ehrlich's "moral compass points true," said Rabbi Sander Goldberg of Baltimore's Congregation Nachal Chochma in a benediction after the formal swearing-in. "He will also serve as a sorely needed role model."

Later, master of ceremonies Marc Steiner, a radio personality, recognized Townsend - who attended the outdoor ceremony - by saying she "represents the integrity of the last eight years," a statement that sent flutters through the crowd. Ehrlich thanked Townsend for coming and shook her hand.
Underdog triumphs

Abandoning a safe congressional seat less than a year ago, Ehrlich mounted an underdog campaign that culminated with a win that made him the first Republican elected Maryland governor since 1966, the longest span of one-party rule in state history.

He is the youngest chief executive since Herbert O'Connor, a former attorney general, took office in 1939.

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Ehrlich is the first former member of Congress to hold the office since John Walter Smith, governor from 1900 to 1904.

Democrats and Republicans said they predict Ehrlich will use the position as a platform to build his party. But Democrats called on him to set aside partisanship, as a difficult General Assembly session - which began last week - moves ahead.

"He can't be successful if there is not collaboration with the Democratically controlled House of Delegates and Senate," said Del. Howard P. Rawlings, a Baltimore Democrat. "He will be reminded often that he ran as a moderate. He is going to be held to that standard."

With few details in his speech - and a budget to be released tomorrow - Ehrlich left some leaders wondering what direction the state will take.

"I just think we're going to have to wait and see if his policies are in line with mainstream Maryland residents," said Rep. Elijah E. Cummings, a Democrat from Baltimore. State lawmakers, Cummings said, "are not folks who normally rubber-stamp what a governor proposes."

"However, I think in these difficult times, we all have to work together," Cummings said.

Baltimore Mayor Martin O'Malley said, "This is just a time to applaud him."

"On Friday, the real work will begin with the budget," O'Malley said. "I'm hopeful that he will keep his promise to hold local jurisdictions harmless."

Jack Kemp, former U.S. secretary of housing and urban development and a featured speaker yesterday, praised the new administration for its vigor and promise.

"My mother used to say there are three kinds of people on this Earth: People who make things happen, people who watch things happen, and people who stand around and say, 'What's happening?'" Kemp said. "You've elected a governor and a lieutenant governor who are going to make things happen."

Ken Mehlman, White House political director and a Maryland native, read a message from President Bush, who called serving as governor "a great honor." Bush was governor of Texas before winning the presidency.

Ehrlich was introduced by Schaefer, a former governor and Baltimore mayor who was Glendening's most vocal critic - notably when the two met as members of the Board of Public Works, which authorizes costly state projects.

"I want Bob Ehrlich to succeed. I want him to be a great governor," Schaefer said. "I promise to make the Board of Public Works uninteresting. I pledge my support and cooperation, for the first six months."

Yesterday's temperatures in the 20s forced first lady Kendel Ehrlich to carry son Drew, 3, into the State House after his father spoke but before the ceremonies were finished.

After a parade around State Circle, the Ehrlichs and their entourage greeted well-wishers at a reception at Government House and then traveled to Baltimore for more celebrating at gala balls at the Baltimore Convention Center and Oriole Park at Camden Yards.

Party time

Ehrlich, Steele and thousands of their supporters packed into the two party locations, feasting on crab cakes, turkey and roast beef. "Tomorrow, the business of government begins for us," Ehrlich told the crowd at the Camden Yards gala. "I want to thank everyone for being a part of history."

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Steele promised the cheering group, "We're going to party hearty today, but tomorrow begins the first day of this administration."

Amid the evening's festivities, Ehrlich's long-time supporters said one moment from the day stood out above all the rest: the swearing-in ceremony at noon.

"The moment he became governor, that was real special," said Richard E. Hug, Ehrlich's chief fund-raiser. "That was the beginning of the change."

Sun staff writers Ivan Penn, Michael Dresser and Sarah Koenig contributed to this article.

GRAPHIC: Photo(s), 1. Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. (left) introduces Lt. Gov. Michael S. Steele during the inauguration at the State House in Annapolis. Steele remarked that he and Ehrlich have climbed "the ladder to opportunity" and reached the pinnacle of Maryland state government.; 2. After his swearing-in, Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr., with wife, Kendel, waves to the gallery of the Senate chamber. Judge Robert M. Bell (left), Lt. Gov. Michael S. Steele and Steele's wife, Andrea, look on.; 3. Before he takes the oath as governor, Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. descends the State House steps with his wife, Kendel, greeting the crowd that gathered in freezing temperatures for the inauguration.; 1. JOHN MAKELY : SUN STAFF; 2. DOUG KAPUSTIN : SUN STAFF; 3. BARBARA HADDOCK TAYLOR : SUN STAFF

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