

Steele heads Md. group's Africa visit ; **Trade**: The lieutenant governor, nine other state officials and representatives of 27 companies leave today for South Africa and Ghana. Nitkin, David. The Baltimore Sun [Baltimore, Md] 15 June 2004: 2B.

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## Abstract

"I've seen him develop from a smart conservative to a real leader," [Robert L. **Ehrlich** Jr.] said, singing the praises of the minority whip who helped the governor guide important legislation to passage this year. Before the 2002 elections, **Ehrlich** said after his remarks, O'Donnell was "angry and a back-bencher." Now, "he's happy and a leader," the governor said.

**Ehrlich** spoke with [Aaron Kraus] for a few minutes yesterday at Lawyers Mall, where Kraus is encamped, then invited Kraus to sleep in the governor's mansion if it rains.

**Ehrlich** vetoed a bill that would have limited tuition and given more funding to the university system. He isn't a fan of Kraus' actions but thinks he "is a nice kid," said Greg Massoni, an **Ehrlich** spokesman. "It's silly of [Kraus] to put his life in danger, and it's a mansion; there's plenty of places for him."

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## Full Text

LT. GOV. Michael S. Steele is scheduled to depart today for a 10- day visit to Ghana and South Africa, leading a contingent of nine other state officials and representatives of 27 companies developing business ties between Maryland and Africa.

"It's the largest Maryland **trade mission** ever to go to Africa," said Steele, the first African-American elected to statewide office in Maryland.

Fourteen of the represented companies are owned by African- Americans, according to the lieutenant governor's office. Democrat Wayne K. Curry, a former Prince George's County executive and an ally of Gov. Robert L. **Ehrlich** Jr.'s also is on the **trip**.

Among the public officials participating are **Ehrlich** communications director Paul S. Schurick; Paul Ellington and Zachary McDaniels of the lieutenant governor's office; and Sharon R. Pinder, who heads the Office of Minority Affairs.

The cost of the **trip** to taxpayers is \$148,338. It is Steele's third international foray since taking office, following visits to Paris and Barbados last year.

Figure in Norris probe gets job with state

The **Ehrlich** administration may have severed ties with former state police Superintendent Edward T. Norris, but friends of Norris can still find the occasional well-paying job in state government.

Katie Leahan, a former WJZ television reporter and anchor, has been hired as a \$79,019-a-year spokeswoman for the Maryland Transportation Authority. Leahan left the television station this year for a position with the CIA, but it appears the job didn't work out.

As Norris was being investigated for using a little-known Baltimore police account for gifts and meals for friends and out-of-town hotel stays, Leahan's name surfaced last year. She was subpoenaed to appear before a grand jury looking into Norris' spending while he was Baltimore's police chief. The Sun's David Folkenflik reported last year that Leahan kept a picture of her and Norris by her desk at the television station.

From 'angry back-bencher' to happy fund-raiser

The ascension of Del. Anthony J. O'Donnell from frustrated bit player to respected Assembly leader was on display last week inside the Annapolis Marriott Hotel, where the Southern Maryland Republican raised \$50,000 at a breakfast fund-raiser that attracted some of the town's biggest names.

"I've seen him develop from a smart conservative to a real leader," Ehrlich said, singing the praises of the minority whip who helped the governor guide important legislation to passage this year. Before the 2002 elections, Ehrlich said after his remarks, O'Donnell was "angry and a back-bencher." Now, "he's happy and a leader," the governor said.

Many leading lobbyists turned out for the breakfast gathering, as did state GOP Chairman John Kane, Ehrlich fund-raising guru Dick Hug and former Gov. Marvin Mandel.

State House news: You can't buy a newspaper there

It's harder to keep abreast of Orioles scores, the horoscope and stock listings inside the State House these days, now that newspaper boxes have been removed from the ground floor. Boxes for The Sun, The Washington Post, The Washington Times, The Capital of Annapolis and other papers were yanked without warning last week from the positions they had held for years.

One person who won't mind the loss is Ehrlich, who says he doesn't read newspapers and is convinced that editors and editorial writers at the state's largest dailies are out to get him. Workers stationed in the State House say they saw the governor point at the newspaper boxes and demand their removal the day they disappeared.

Ehrlich said yesterday that he did give such an order, but not because of his dislike of the press. The governor said he has been briefed regularly about security issues and that the threat of terrorism is leading to changes. "There's a new level of security that is going to go on around here," he said, promising more details later.

Survey finds Ehrlich with 52% approval rating

The results of a telephone survey of 836 registered voters, which were released yesterday, indicate that 52 percent of Maryland voters approve of the job Ehrlich is doing, while 33 percent disapprove.

The governor's job-approval rating was 5 percentage points lower than it had been a year earlier, according to the poll by Gonzalez Research and Marketing Strategies.

The survey found Democratic U.S. Sen. Barbara A. Mikulski leading her Republican opponent, state Sen. E.J. Pipkin, 61 percent to 30 percent, with 9 percent undecided.

He's going without food, but he has a place to sleep

Aaron Kraus, the University of Maryland student government president, who is on a hunger strike to protest rising tuition, has a place to stay in case of bad weather: the governor's

mansion.

**Ehrlich** spoke with Kraus for a few minutes yesterday at Lawyers Mall, where Kraus is encamped, then invited Kraus to sleep in the governor's mansion if it rains.

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Sun staff writer Jason Song contributed to this column.

Credit: SUN STAFF

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