

Hogan, Ehrlich, Glendening, Hughes pay respects to former Mandel at State House

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In the rotunda of the State House, where the body of former Gov. Marvin Mandel lay in a flag-draped coffin, former Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. stepped away from a throng of mourners to try to describe the man, a friend as well as a towering figure in Maryland's political history.

To Ehrlich's right, a group of Democratic legislators stood chatting. To his left, a few high-profile Republicans traded tales of Mandel.

The groups interacted freely, often laughing. To Ehrlich, a Republican, that made a powerful point about the state's 56th governor, a Democrat.

"Marvin didn't see [political] party," he said. "He saw people, and he saw the state of Maryland, and he did what he thought was best for our state.

"It's one of the things that made him such an effective public servant."

Ehrlich, the state's 60th governor, was one of dozens of elected officials, past and present, who joined relatives and members of the public Wednesday in paying their respects to Mandel. The two-plus-term governor died in St. Mary's County on Sunday at age 95.

Gov. Larry Hogan welcomed members of Mandel's family to the State House. In brief remarks he described Mandel as "a man who spent 26 years in elected office — and 95 years of his life — working to make Maryland a better place."

Hogan appeared to fight back tears as he described the many occasions on which Mandel took time to offer him friendship and counsel, both before and after he took office in January.

Mandel was known for befriending and sharing his insights with his successors, whatever their political affiliation — an inclination that former Lt. Gov. Michael S. Steele said spoke to Mandel's commitment not to self-aggrandizement or partisan interests but to what mattered to the citizens of the state.

"He was so helpful to Bob and me, especially during our transition, sharing his insights about how this big thing, the executive branch, worked," Steele said. "He would stand out in today's political environment."

The gathering drew three former governors — Ehrlich, Harry Hughes and Parris N. Glendening — and many current and former officials. They offered condolences to Ellen Maltz, Mandel's daughter, Paul Dorsey, his stepson, and many in-laws and grandchildren.

Mandel, a Baltimore native, was serving as the speaker of the House of Delegates when the General Assembly chose him to succeed Republican Gov. Spiro T. Agnew, who left Maryland to become vice president under President Richard M. Nixon.

Mandel served out the remainder of Agnew's term, then won election as governor twice, both times by wide margins. His tenure lasted from 1969 to 1979.

He was widely recognized for creating the governor's Cabinet and investing billions in public schools and transportation. But his legacy was tarnished by his conviction in 1977 on mail fraud and racketeering charges.

He spent 19 months in federal prison before President Ronald Reagan commuted his sentence in 1981. After a long legal battle, the conviction was thrown out.

Mandel returned to public life in 2003 as chair of a commission named by Ehrlich to seek efficiencies in government. Later, Ehrlich named Mandel to the Board of Regents of the University System of Maryland, a position he held through 2009.

The controversies in Mandel's career did little to diminish the respect evident in the service Wednesday and the words of those who attended.

An honor guard met the hearse that carried the coffin to the State House as a brass band played. Hogan told mourners of a man he said might have been the greatest governor in state history.

"He had more impact on the three branches of government than any governor before or after, but his legacy was more than that," Hogan said, his voice quavering. "[He was] a great man, a great governor, a father, a grandfather and a friend to many of us here."

Rabbi Stuart Weinblatt of Congregation B'nai Tzedek in Potomac read prayers over the coffin. Mandel was Maryland's only Jewish governor.

Mandel's granddaughter Morissa Maltz, a filmmaker, said the family appreciated the dignified and respectful nature of the event and the attendance of so many people.

Then, like many of the mourners, she shared a memory that evoked one more facet of a multifaceted man.

Having learned that her grandfather admired the work of John Waters, she accompanied him to a visit to the filmmaker's house, where they enjoyed a four-hour visit.

The "Hairspray" director and the former governor, she said, shared a deep affection for their home state.

It was the last day she and her grandfather spent together.

"I was in love with my grandpa. He was the best human ever — which I'd say with even more emotion if I hadn't already cried my eyes out," Maltz said.

Many spoke Wednesday of the ways in which Mandel connected with fellow Marylanders, whether they were legislators, lobbyists or ordinary citizens.

Hughes said the soft-spoken Mandel, who was famed for the pipe he seemed always to be puffing thoughtfully, had an even-tempered nature that served him well.

"I never saw him get angry or excited," Hughes said. "He had a very calm way about him. That was very effective."

Longtime Annapolis lobbyist Bruce Bereano, a friend for 42 years, remembered a governor who made others comfortable by being a good listener, who was willing to see any legislator in his office on as little as 15 minutes' notice, and who enjoyed a special connection with Marylanders on the campaign trail — where he was known to march into pool halls, pick up a cue and take on all comers.

"By the time he left the place, he was their buddy," Bereano said. "People don't forget things like that."

State Sen. Gail H. Bates, a Republican, said she began seeking Mandel's advice when she was a freshman

legislator, and never really stopped.

Tears came to her eyes as she recalled "a precious man."

"I hope he'll be remembered for the good he did," said Bates, who represents District 9, which includes parts of Carroll and Howard counties. "We're all fallible; we all make mistakes. The good stuff was what we picked his brain on. It made me a better senator."

The event began at 10 a.m. Wednesday. By noon, most dignitaries had cleared out, leaving a quieter rotunda to members of the public who drifted in.

Joe Hopkins, an IT professional who works in Annapolis, stopped to gaze at Mandel's official portrait, which Hogan prevailed on the State House Trust to move to the rotunda for the occasion.

Hopkins never met Mandel, he said, but he often saw the ex-governor around town, where he was given to chatting with residents or stopping in for a meal at Chick and Ruth's Delly.

Mandel seemed less formidable in person than one might have expected, given his importance, Hopkins said, but that only added to his mystique.

"I never approached him, but I felt like I could have," he said. "That's why I came today. Even though I didn't know him, it feels like I'm saying goodbye to an old friend."

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