

# Ehrlich promises to bring change to Maryland

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ANNAPOLIS – Former Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. thought his career in politics was finished four years ago, when he lost his bid for reelection.

“My observations and my conclusion,” Ehrlich said, “was that the state and the country had moved too far away from my principles and my philosophical orientation and the direction I wanted the state and country to go.”

He senses, however, that the electorate is shifting back toward his outlook – one focused on pro-growth economic policies and a more limited role for government.

Ehrlich wants his job back so he can enact what he believes will be a fiscally responsible, “common-sense” agenda.

Ehrlich spoke during an Oct. 4 interview with the board of governors and administrative board of the Maryland Catholic Conference, held at St. John Neumann in Annapolis. He also answered follow-up questions from The Catholic Review and other Catholic newspapers.

Helping nonpublic schools will be an important component of his public policy, Ehrlich said. The Republican nominee said Catholic and other nonpublic schools are particularly important to children in communities throughout the state who don’t have access to a quality education.

“I am on record, repeatedly, with regard to the importance of Catholic education and the importance of these Catholic schools vis-à-vis these marginal kids,” he said. “To the extent you can place marginal kids in better educational settings – charter schools, Catholic schools, private schools – so much the better.”

As someone raised in Arbutus who represented the area in the U.S. Congress and

Maryland General Assembly, Ehrlich said he was hit hard by the recent closures of Ascension School in Halethorpe and The Cardinal Gibbons School in Baltimore. He believes programs like BOAST - Building Opportunities for All Students and Teachers in Maryland - need to be passed to support children attending nonpublic schools. BOAST would provide a business tax credit for donations to scholarship programs for children attending nonpublic schools.

"We need more votes to pass BOAST," said Ehrlich, a graduate of Gilman School in Baltimore and Princeton University.

"It shouldn't be a partisan matter," he said, "but there's a very strong lobby on the other side and there are a lot of votes on the other side. If someone is voting against it and it's an important issue to you, you should vote against that person come election."

Ehrlich said he would continue funding for a program that provides textbooks and technology in the nonpublic schools. He would not, however, commit to a specific dollar amount for the program.

The Republican nominee, a Methodist, said he supports conscience rights for medical institutions with religious affiliations. He criticized a recent law passed in Baltimore that requires pro-life pregnancy resource centers to post signs saying what services they do not provide.

"It's looking for a fight," he said, "when none exists."

Although he believes abortion should remain legal, Ehrlich said he opposes late-term abortions and supports parental notification for minors seeking abortion.

Asked whether he would support a measure requiring abortion clinics to be regulated as ambulatory surgical centers and not simply as doctors' offices, Ehrlich said he needed to study it more.

"I think the predicate should be what's best for the woman and the baby," he said.

Ehrlich opposes gay marriage, but said there should be "bundles of rights" attached to "non-traditional relationships."

"We brought all the parties together in our administration and passed a bill along those lines," he said. "To confuse that very legitimate public policy with marriage is very dangerous."

Ehrlich called marriage the "baseline cultural institution in society" and said public-policy goals should encourage traditional marriage.

A strong supporter of the death penalty who allowed two executions to proceed when he was governor, Ehrlich was blistering in his criticism of the passage of a Maryland law restricting the death penalty to cases with DNA or video evidence.

"That was a half-baked effort to defeat capital punishment," Ehrlich said. "I would repeal that law if I could because we had very strong laws prior to that law and this has just made a mess of a very difficult subject area in the law."

Ehrlich said his administration would study each death penalty case that comes to his desk to ensure no innocent person is executed. If Ehrlich believed justice was not served, he would pursue pardons and commutations. As governor, Ehrlich granted the release of six people serving life sentences.

"Governors get to further the cause of justice," he said.

Ehrlich said he opposes providing driver's licenses to illegal immigrants and believes existing immigration laws should be enforced.

He said he would not provide financial support to Casa de Maryland, an immigrants' advocacy group. He charged groups like Casa with drifting away from their original charters that he said were designed to help immigrants assimilate, learn the language and be educated on capitalism and democracy.

"Some of these groups are engaged in taking our tax dollars and creating pamphlets to assist illegals with escaping the law," Ehrlich said. "That's why the people are so angry and I will stop that practice as governor."

Asked his opinion of an Arizona law that requires state and local law enforcement officers to enforce federal immigration laws, Ehrlich said Arizona voters have a right to protect themselves.

“Maryland is not Arizona,” he said. “Maryland has its own subset of different issues.”

Ehrlich said he sees nothing wrong with state and local law enforcement officers checking the immigration status of someone they pulled over for probable cause.

“To the extent you have bad stops – non-probable cause, racial, ethnic stops – that’s against the law today,” he said. “It’s unconstitutional. People need to understand the difference.”

The former governor called the federal health care law signed by President Barack Obama “absolutely disastrous.”

“Never before in the history of the United States of America has the federal government forced an individual citizen to buy a commercial product under the threat of punitive action,” Ehrlich said. “I hope there are changes in Congress and I hope that when those changes occur, we get to the essential issues here, which are portability, flexibility and the ability of the working poor to secure health care insurance.”

The candidate said he would consider a proposal to prohibit landlords from discriminating against prospective tenants based on their source of income.

Ehrlich said he is glad he got back into politics and that voters have a clear choice in the election.

“It’s two candidates who have won, who have very strong personalities and very strong and different belief systems and orientations with regard to public policies,” Ehrlich said. “I think that’s as good as democracy gets.”