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Ehrlich had interest in joining Trump administration, remains mum on governor race



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Former Maryland Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. said he initially expressed interest in joining the second Trump administration and was mum about any ambitions for running for Maryland governor again in an interview Thursday with the Capital Gazette.

Ehrlich, who served as the governor of Maryland from 2003 to 2007, has aligned himself with the Trump administration through his books and social media posts in recent years. He is one of two Republicans to serve as the state's governor within the past 55 years, the other being Larry Hogan. Ehrlich, now 67 years old, lost his reelection bid in 2006 against Democrat Martin O'Malley.

He said he expressed interest last year in being a part of the second Trump administration and said he participated in early preliminary talks to be the secretary of education. The role went to Linda McMahon, who was the CEO of World Wrestling Entertainment, more commonly known as the WWE.

"Kendel and I have always had an interest in giving opportunities to young people, especially poor, working-class kids," Ehrlich said, referring to his wife, Kendel Ehrlich. "We have a long history, long interest in education issues."

He added that McMahon is doing what the president campaigned on, and called her a friend. Ehrlich said the education department is doing its job in an "appropriate way," including McMahon's work to, as Ehrlich said, attack antisemitism on college campuses.

While confirming this interest, Ehrlich highlighted his work as governor related to education, including a bill that required the state's school districts to create policies to allow the creation of charter schools.

The White House did not immediately respond Thursday afternoon to a request for comment.

Todd Eberly, a professor of political science at St. Mary's College, said Ehrlich's best chance of returning to politics would be as a member of a Republican presidential administration, due to the Democratic majority in Maryland and the former governor's alignment with President Donald Trump.

Ehrlich appealed to moderate Republicans while governor, Eberly said, but has since sided more with the MAGA movement, which would make it difficult to run statewide. Eberly referenced outspoken Trump supporter Dan Cox, who ran against now-Gov. Wes Moore in the 2022 election, and got about 32.12% of the statewide vote.

Trump earned support from about 34.08% of Maryland voters in the 2024 presidential election.

Asked whether he has plans to run for governor again in 2026, Ehrlich declined to comment. He also didn't want to discuss any of the candidates who have already entered the race for governor. Democrat Gov. Wes Moore is up for reelection in 2026.

The former governor said he could see the field of candidates changing significantly before the February deadline to register as a candidate.

Ehrlich is likely watching what Republican Gov. Larry Hogan decides to do in the gubernatorial election, said Roger Hartley, dean of the University of Baltimore's College of Public Affairs.

Hogan, who was governor from 2015 to 2023, ran an unsuccessful bid for U.S. Senate in Maryland last year, getting 42.84% of the votes against then-Prince George's County Executive Angela Alsobrooks, a Democrat. Hogan didn't announce his intent to run for Senate until hours ahead of the filing deadline in 2024.

Hogan has distanced himself from the current president, including saying that he would not vote for either party's candidate in the 2024 election and that he didn't vote for Trump in 2016, 2020 or 2024.

“The trick for a former governor like Ehrlich is to try to show his bona fides with the Republican Party as a true conservative, but then also remain faithful to the political ideology of our state as a whole, which is largely Democrat and independent,” Hartley said.

The former governor, Hartley said, would also have to find a way to reintroduce himself to the Maryland electorate in a post-Trump political environment.

Ehrlich said he believes any Republican candidate for governor should “be doing their own thing, feeling free to agree with the president and praise him when they agree with him, or if they feel as though they need to criticize him on an issue, do that as well.”

Any candidate for governor, Ehrlich said, needs to talk about their platform, fundraise and find ways to get earned media.

Ehrlich said he has been focused in recent years on boosting Republicans in local races across the state, including endorsing Annapolis mayor candidate O’Shea and other Republicans on the city ballot this week, and attending party events. Part of his goal is to ensure that Maryland has diverse leadership, including at the local level.

“Monopolies are never good,” Ehrlich said, referencing the Democrats’ hold on Annapolis elections. “Monopolies are typically tone-deaf when it comes to the general public.”

Have a news tip? Contact Katharine Wilson at kwilson@baltsun.com.