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From the Baltimore Sun

O'Malley upbeat as bus tour begins

By John Fritze and Andrew A. Green
sun reporters

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As he kicked off a bus tour that is expected to carry him to all corners of the state, Baltimore Mayor Martin O'Malley said he is confident in his lead over Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. and said he will not change his strategy despite a poll in *The Sun* that indicated he is losing ground in key counties.

As the Democrat traveled through Western Maryland yesterday - stopping off in Frederick and Hagerstown - he could not escape questions about the poll, which found that he is in a virtual dead heat with Ehrlich less than a week before the Nov. 7 general election. The poll found Ehrlich with significant leads in Baltimore County and Anne Arundel County.

"What really matters is what the people of Maryland are going to say in six days," O'Malley said several times throughout the day. "This campaign is all about the hope of a better tomorrow for Maryland."

The poll, which became the topic of conversation for much of the day yesterday, found that 47 percent of respondents supported O'Malley compared with 46 percent for Ehrlich. That was well within the 3.5 percentage point margin of error. O'Malley led by 6 percentage points in September.

As O'Malley made his final campaign swing through Western Maryland, an area where most residents have traditionally voted for Republicans, Ehrlich headed into the Washington suburbs, the center of the Democrats' base of support. After a stop at a Gaithersburg senior housing complex, he went to the Silver Spring Metro station, in the middle of some of the most liberal communities in the state, to shake hands and woo voters.

At first, things did not appear to go well.

"You're going to lose, big time," the first man to shake Ehrlich's hand said before walking off to catch a bus.

But things quickly turned around. Ehrlich was joined by his wife, Kendel, his running mate, Kristen Cox, and Attorney General candidate Scott Rolle, and a group of volunteers fanned out to pass out literature and steer interested commuters to the governor. Most walked on without giving the volunteers a second glance, but some said they were eager to get a closer look at the governor.

Rebecca Haehnle, a Silver Spring salon owner, said she recently moved to Maryland from Washington and was eager to meet Ehrlich. She said it might affect her vote.

"It's great to have a conversation with whoever is running, to have them staring you in the face and shaking your hand," she said. "I think that's a great thing to see."

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Both candidates have stepped up their schedules in the final days of the campaign. The mayor boarded his bus - emblazoned with the campaign's trademark chartreuse - at his home in Baltimore's Beverly Hills neighborhood yesterday morning. He spoke to seniors at an Owings Mills senior center and, later, received the endorsement of the Hagerstown police union. In between, he had lunch with a small group of students at [Frederick Community College](#).

"They paid attention to the little details that Ehrlich has overlooked for years," Holly Goldstein, an 18-year-old Frederick student, said after hearing the candidates.

In a show of unity, all of the statewide Democratic candidates made stops on the bus at various points yesterday, including Rep. Benjamin L. Cardin, who is running for the U.S. Senate, and Douglas F. Gansler, who is running for attorney general. U.S. Sen. Barbara A. Mikulski stumped for the ticket throughout the day.

Inside the bus, the candidates and a small number of staff members sat on gray leather chairs as the bus wound its way through the state. O'Malley and his running mate, Del. Anthony G. Brown, were expected to ride on the bus overnight on the way to their first [Ocean City](#) event this morning.

As the candidates walked down Frederick's Market Street, though, a small group of people stood nearby holding Ehrlich and Steele campaign signs. At one point O'Malley yelled out to them, jokingly: "Where's your candidate?"

As Cardin stumped with O'Malley, his opponent, Republican Lt. Gov. Michael S. Steele, visited [Coppin State University](#). Steele visited [Morgan State University](#) on Tuesday, but he said the back-to-back appearances at historically black campuses were not directed at African-American voters.

Steele said the purpose of his visit was to monitor physical improvements on the campus, which is undergoing a construction boom thanks to millions of dollars in additional state funding in recent years. Steele said that if elected, he would support continued federal oversight of Maryland's black colleges - an apparent break with the Ehrlich administration's position.

Ehrlich didn't go into the potentially hostile turf of Montgomery County unprepared. He lost badly there, as Republicans before him have for years. But he and his volunteers were armed with brochures specific to Montgomery County, emphasizing his support for stem-cell research and the long-delayed Inter-County Connector, a road many hope would help solve the region's traffic congestion.

Ehrlich played up his transportation credentials when a television reporter from a Washington station happened by, giving an interview about his support for the ICC and mass transit.

But no amount of transportation funding is going to win over everyone in Montgomery County.

"Don't believe a word he says," a woman said before walking off into the night.

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CANDIDATES TODAY

Ehrlich // 9:50 a.m., speak with Patricia C. Jessamy, Baltimore City State's Attorney, at the Baltimore City Fraternal Order of Police Lodge #3, 3920 Buena Vista Rd., Baltimore; 2:15 p.m., cast absentee ballot with first lady Kendel Ehrlich, Anne Arundel County Board of Election, 7320 Ritchie Highway, Glen Burnie.

O'Malley // 8:30 a.m., breakfast at Layton's Family Restaurant, 1601 Philadelphia Ave, [Ocean City](#); 9:30 a.m. rally at Ocean Pines Yacht Club, 239 Ocean Parkway, Ocean Pines; 11:30 a.m., talk with students at [Salisbury University](#), 1101 Camden Ave., Salisbury; 1:30 p.m., rally at Cambridge Bethel AME Church, 623 Pine St., Cambridge; 4:30 p.m., rally with Sen. John Edwards, [Morgan State University](#), 1700 East Cold Spring Lane, Baltimore.

CARDIN // 4:30 p.m., rally with Sen. John Edwards, [Morgan State University](#), 1700 East Cold Spring Lane, Baltimore.

STEELE // 1 p.m., endorsement by religious leaders, Lawyers Mall, 100 State Circle, [Annapolis](#).

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