

Ehrlich says she's 'uniquely suited' to county executive spot

By ALLISON BOURG, Staff Writer | Posted: Tuesday, February 12, 2013 11:00 am

Days after Maryland's former first lady surfaced as a possible candidate for Anne Arundel County executive, another Republican who was interested in the job backed down.

Kendel Ehrlich, whose husband Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. was governor of Maryland from 2003 to 2007, said Monday the county has a "unique situation in politics" and she is "uniquely suited" for it because she has no plans to run for the seat in 2014.

She said she won't be motivated by politics and will focus on the job at hand.

"We need some leadership. There's been some absence of that," said Ehrlich, who will appear at a candidates forum Thursday in Odenton. "We've had someone who hasn't been available, both for health reasons and for other reasons."

Dan Nataf, a professor of political science at Anne Arundel Community College and director of its Center for the Study of Local Issues, said the notion of having a "caretaker" finish out John R. Leopold's term could be good because that person wouldn't be distracted by what's politically popular.

But while the Ehrlich name "has 100 percent recognition," Kendel Ehrlich's potential unfamiliarity with county government might be a disadvantage, Nataf said.

She "is an unproven candidate," he said. "She's not like (acting County Executive) John Hammond, who could do this with his eyes closed."

Meanwhile, another prospective candidate, Dan Bongino, said Monday he won't be applying for Leopold's seat.

But he said Ehrlich's presence in the race had nothing to do with his decision to step aside, even as he charged the appointment process is "insider-driven" and geared toward people with political ties.

"It doesn't do any good to indict people specifically. This is unequivocally not directed at Kendel Ehrlich," said Bongino, a 2012 candidate for U.S. Senate.

In a statement posted Monday afternoon on his Facebook page, Bongino said he also won't be seeking the position of chairman of the Maryland Republican Party. Chairman Alex X. Mooney announced his resignation Saturday.

"I had some good supporters, but I have now decided it's not for me," Bongino said.

Ehrlich, of Annapolis, said she has received a lot of encouragement through social media and will

continue to seek support this week before deciding whether to apply.

Friday is the deadline for submitting applications to the County Council.

Leopold, a Republican who was in his second term, resigned Feb. 1 after he was found guilty of two counts of misconduct in office. The County Council has 30 days to fill his seat with another Republican. The GOP holds a 4-3 majority on the council.

During Leopold's criminal trial, retired Circuit Court Judge Dennis Sweeney heard testimony that the former county executive ordered his security detail to transport him to sexual encounters in a bowling alley parking lot and run interference between his two girlfriends.

Sweeney ultimately found Leopold guilty of ordering his officers and other employees to do campaign work and empty his catheter bag after he had back surgery. In his ruling from the bench, he said he couldn't find Leopold guilty of misconduct because of his behavior with women, but chided him nonetheless.

Ehrlich said some who have urged her to apply for the seat feel her gender could be a plus, "given the circumstances" of Leopold's departure.

She said a new county executive should concentrate on economic development, particularly in west county, a hot spot for growth because of Fort George G. Meade.

"We have so much to sell in Anne Arundel County. We need a chief salesman," Ehrlich said.