

# Ehrlich testifies Schurick is a 'church guy'

## Steele, Mandel also character witnesses in robo-call trial

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Former GOP Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. testified Thursday as a character witness at the trial of a longtime aide who is accused of trying to suppress the black vote on Election Day in last year's rematch between Ehrlich and Democratic Gov. Martin O'Malley.

The afternoon of testimony in the trial of the onetime Ehrlich aide, Paul Schurick, included a stream of former officials in state government, including another former governor, Marvin Mandel, a Democrat, and former Lt. Gov. Michael Steele.

"He is a church guy, a family guy," Ehrlich said, noting that he trusted Schurick with his most important decisions as governor and a member of Congress. "He is a good guy."

The men spoke on the third day of testimony in a criminal case brought by state prosecutors accusing Schurick of approving a robo-call sent in the late afternoon on Election Day last year to about 110,000 Democratic voters in Baltimore city and Prince George's County.

"Hello. I'm calling to let everybody know that Governor O'Malley and President Obama have been successful," the call said. "Our goals have been met. The polls were correct, and we took it back. We're OK. Relax. Everything's fine. The only thing left is to watch it on TV tonight. Congratulations, and thank



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Paul Schurick (second from right) listens as his lawyers, Matthew Bennett (center) and A. Dwight Pettit (left) talk to reporters on Monday.

you."

Prosecutors contend the call was an effort to reduce the number of black Democrats from voting, but witnesses called by the defense say it was actually intended to stimulate people to vote for Ehrlich by using reverse psychology.

Steele, who was Maryland's first African American to be elected to statewide office and went on to become the first black chairman of the Republican Party, described Schurick as a smart and careful aide when he testified as a character witness.

"I've always found him to be a straight shooter," Steele said.

James "Chip" Dipaula, Ehrlich's former chief of staff and budget secretary when he was governor, testified he has

known Schurick dating back to when Ehrlich was a congressman. Schurick acted as Ehrlich's campaign manager in the 2010 governor's race.

"I think Paul is one of God's great people," Dipaula said, describing him as supportive, compassionate and a great friend.

Ehrlich and the other witnesses focused their comments on Schurick's character, not on details of the case.

Ehrlich, speaking to reporters after testifying, declined to talk about details of the case, but he said he would after the case is over.

Testimony from defense witnesses is scheduled to continue Friday. Schurick also will likely testify, his attorneys say.

Before the jury heard testimony

Thursday, Baltimore Circuit Judge Lawrence Fletcher-Hill dismissed an obstruction of justice charge against Schurick during a hearing with attorneys. The judge denied defense requests to throw out other charges in the case.

The obstruction of justice charge dismissed by the judge related to allegations that Schurick withheld documents sought by a subpoena.

Fletcher-Hill said the evidence failed to support that allegation. While the judge said the jury will decide the other charges, he said the public has an interest in knowing who is speaking in distributed campaign material in order to make an informed decision.

"It plainly misrepresents the source of the message," Fletcher-Hill said during a motions hearing with prosecutors and defense attorneys before the jury was brought in to hear the third day of testimony in the case.

Matthew Bennett, an attorney representing Schurick, argued that prosecutors have failed to show the call actually suppressed voters.

But the judge said the law also prohibits attempts to suppress voter turnout.

Schurick is charged with two counts of conspiracy to violate state election laws. He also is charged with one count of attempting to influence a voter's decision whether to go to the polls through the use of fraud and one count of failing to provide an authority line on distributed campaign material.

The authority line violation carries a maximum of a year in prison if convicted. The other charges carry up to five years in prison on each count if convicted.

Julius Henson, a political consultant, also is charged in the case. His trial is scheduled for February.