

## Travel expenses questioned

Saturday, 17 May 2008

<http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/local/politics/bal-md.travel18may18,0,5691609.story>

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GOP criticizes \$172,000 in spending by O'Malley and Brown

By Laura Smitherman

Sun reporter; May 18, 2008

Gov. Martin O'Malley and Lt. Gov. Anthony G. Brown have spent more than \$172,000 in taxpayer dollars since taking office last year on trips for state business and political events around the county, and to foreign locales from Ireland to China, according to travel records obtained by The Sun.

The expenses, racked up over 84 days that O'Malley and Brown traveled out of the state during their first 15 months in office, include the cost to dispatch state troopers with the Democratic governor as bodyguards when he campaigned for presidential candidate Hillary Clinton in New Hampshire and when he attended a Nashville gathering of the Democratic Leadership Council, a centrist think tank that's closely aligned with the Clintons.

Also among the expenses is the cost to take staff and security detail on two trips O'Malley made to Ireland that were sponsored by outside groups that invited the governor to be a speaker. Brown reported the most expensive trip, a weeklong trade mission to China that cost more than \$96,000.

While the travel at state expense is roughly on par with what the previous administration logged, Republicans criticized O'Malley for making some of the trips at a time when the state's fiscal distress led him to push for higher taxes and spending cuts, and some said that security expenses for political events should be reimbursed by the party or candidate.

The critique is reminiscent of calls from Democrats several years ago for former Lt. Gov. Michael S. Steele, a Republican, to reimburse the state the cost to bring his security detail on political jaunts. He went to battleground states in 2004 to campaign for President Bush, and hit the national political circuit when he ran for U.S. Senate in 2006.

"It would be nice if someone stood up and said, 'I'm not going to ask the citizens of Maryland to pay for me to campaign for someone else in another state.' ... I feel the same way about any administration," said Sen. Allan H. Kittleman, the minority whip who represents Howard and Carroll counties. "And here we are with a financial crisis, and someone is going to take the people's money and spend it to go to Ireland to watch someone else receive an award."

O'Malley spokesman Rick Abbruzzese said the governor's hosts paid travel expenses whenever possible. For instance, Clinton's campaign, the Democratic Leadership Council and O'Malley's political fundraising committee did pay for transportation, lodging and some - but not all - expenses for the state troopers on the political trips, according to the travel records obtained under Maryland's Public Information Act. Security costs paid by the state for those trips totaled \$4,930.

Abbruzzese said the administration has reduced the security contingent taken on out-of-state trips. "There are significant security reasons why a small detail does travel with them," Abbruzzese said. "But we made a decision early on to make it minimal."

Travel by elected officials on the state's dime has been perennial fodder for angry taxpayers and political opponents, and

Annapolis has provided plenty of examples.

Several years ago, State House circles were riled when Gov. Parris N. Glendening, a Democrat, took out-of-state trips with an aide he later married. And in the 1990s, Gov. William Donald Schaefer, also a Democrat, came under fire for trips to Europe, the Soviet Union, Canada, Asia and the Middle East that critics said were unnecessary or extravagant.

"Any time you have an expense account, there are areas where the line can be crossed," said Dee Hodges, president of the Maryland Taxpayers Association, adding that the purpose of the trip and the size of the traveling party are factors that should be considered.

Critics first questioned O'Malley's travel last year when the governor flew to Dublin to give a speech to the Chamber of Commerce and attend festivities in honor Dr. Robert C. Gallo, who co-discovered the AIDS virus and heads the Institute of Human Virology at the University of Maryland Biotechnology Institute. The October trip came days before a special session of the General Assembly called by O'Malley in which he proposed \$1.3 billion in tax increases and hundreds of millions in spending cuts to erase a budget deficit.

The chamber reimbursed the governor's airfare, but the state picked up other expenses that totaled about \$17,970. It was O'Malley's second trip to Ireland in six months. He gave a speech to Boston College's Irish Institute in Dublin in April 2007 at a cost to the state of \$8,120.

Abbruzzese said a "substantial portion" of the trips were paid by the Irish hosts, and he noted that O'Malley capitalized on the opportunity to promote economic development ties between Maryland and Ireland, one of the wealthiest countries in the world.

Other statewide officials have traveled less extensively. Attorney General Douglas F. Gansler reported \$2,475 in costs to attend conferences in California, Utah and Tennessee. Comptroller Peter Franchot spent \$1,920 to attend meetings of a national comptrollers association in Alabama and Tennessee.

Gansler and Franchot have a security detail when on official business in the state, but neither takes troopers when they travel. Both paid their own expenses when campaigning in other states for presidential candidate Barack Obama, according to their offices.

Brown made nine campaign stops between September and February for Clinton, but unlike Steele, he didn't take state troopers with him. Steele attended dozens of GOP events during his four-year term, costing taxpayers more than \$60,000 in security expenses. Maryland State Police spokesman Greg Shipley said the fact that Steele was a Senate candidate when he made some trips could have affected security considerations.

Shipley said troopers provide security wherever governors go, including personal trips. O'Malley and his family have gone to North Carolina's Outer Banks and to the Dominican Republic on vacation. Former Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr., a Republican who lost re-election to O'Malley, took personal trips to the Bahamas, Las Vegas, France, Puerto Rico and elsewhere.

O'Malley also went to Las Vegas for a convention of the International Council of Shopping Centers, a global trade association of the shopping center industry, to draw retailers to Maryland, and to Traverse City, Mich., for the National Governors Association's annual meeting. Ehrlich made similar official visits.

