

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

C. BERNARD FOWLER

**MARYLAND STATE SENATOR
COUNTY COMMISSIONER
ENVIRONMENTAL LEADER
CALVERT COUNTY, MARYLAND**

EDUCATIONAL PLANNING IN CALVERT COUNTY

INTERVIEWED BY

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Wilson: I'm Wilson Parran, currently the Deputy Secretary of the Maryland Department of Transportation. I have known Senator Fowler for many, many years, from my high school years and from his years on the Calvert County Board of Education. I have known him and I've followed his political career and his public service to the County and also the State of Maryland from when he was President on the Board of Education in Calvert County to County Commissioner, starting from '70 to 1982, and as a Senator serving this region, from 1983 to 1994.

This was a period of transition for Calvert County. Calvert County was one of the poorest counties in the state. Senator Fowler, over the many years in his role as the President of the Board of Education, subsequently President of Commissioners, he had the vision to set the direction for Calvert County that is still the direction that we have today. It's really an honor to be able to spend some time reflecting with Senator Fowler about his leadership and his accomplishments over all those years.

Senator Fowler: It's ironic, but Wilson and I have had similar experiences in the public office. I went to him and asked him to serve on the local Board of Education. I had started on the Board of Education, was President. Appointments in those days was six years.

Speaker 3: Oh, okay.

Senator Fowler: The last four years I served as President. We needed somebody of his caliber on the Board of Education to continue to see things coming down the road now. You want to make sure you got people in the right place to handle it. Education was one of our number one targets. He accepted. Then, later I got him to serve on the State Board of Education because we hadn't had a representative that I could remember over my lifetime. Yet he was a perfect candidate. That worked. It turned out. He was a big help to them when we got up there.

Wilson: Senator Fowler, how are you doing today?

Senator Fowler: I'm doing great, thank you.

Wilson: Good. I've known you for many, many years. I first came in contact with you when you were on the Board of Education. Now, your commitment spans decades in Calvert County. Tell me a little bit about, you were president of the Board of Education at a time when it was a challenge for education in Calvert County. There were a lot of things going on. Just for the record, I graduated 1968. You were President of the Board at the time that I graduated. Tell me about your years on the Board of Education.

HIRING TEACHERS FOR CALVERT COUNTY

Senator Fowler: My years on the Board of Education were truly a joy for me. It came in a time when we had some very challenging issues to face. We very fortunately we had the Superintendent of Schools at that time was Maurice Dunkle. He was well-equipped intellectually. He also had the sensitivity of knowing when to hold and when to fold. You recall that on about this time, we were under the gun to integrate all of the schools in Calvert County, which was long overdue. I was President of the Board when that occurred.

Through the guidance and the knowhow, and the temperament of Maurice Dunkle, we were able to succeed in that completely, without one racial incident whatsoever. I thought that was a very, very proper way to do it obviously, and overwhelmed with the success that we had in doing that. It should have happened a couple hundred years sooner, but better late than never, I guess. Along with that, the one thing that was always troubling with me on the Board of Education, we never ... We were always lacking funds. We couldn't pay teachers a decent salary. Our turnover rate in Calvert County was probably the highest in the state.

I recall one year we had a 40% turnover in the teachers. That's almost disaster. What was happening, the young teachers would get out of college, and they'd get certified, and they'd come to Calvert County because there were plenty of job openings here for them. They'd work for two or three years, garner up some experience, and then they'd move on to the larger, more wealthy counties like Prince George, and Montgomery, and Anne Arundel County. We would have to really fight. In fact, there was times when, in hiring teachers, that you'd just feel them. If they were warm, you would hire them because you had to fill the spots.

There were times when we were not able to fill all the teaching spots. We had to use substitute people in to do that. Our county

at that time was the second poorest county in the State of Maryland. Our education system wasn't a whole lot better. That's not to say that we didn't have a lot of successful people that went through the system here. We've had some very notable people that did well. Professors at John Hopkins University, in the service during World War II, they were Colonels and all kind of people that went through this system that did quite well. Anyway, the thing that was troubling to me was the lack of funds.

I recall one year. It's kind of a funny story. I recall one year that Mr. Dunkle called me on the phone. He was desperate. It is now the first week of June, and the County Commissioners at that time had not approved the budget. There was no requirement for them to have a certain date in which to meet a deadline on the budget. They weren't in any hurry. It was reaching a point where we couldn't get contracts signed to the teachers because we didn't know what their salaries were going to be. He was desperate. He told me, he said, "Is there anything you can do?" I said, "This is ..." They only met on Tuesdays for a little while in those days. I said, "Well, let me see if I can get a hold of a few of the Commissioners and talk with them."

At that time we only had three commissioners, which wasn't a bad system, quite frankly. It worked good. I visited two of the three commissioners. I couldn't find the third one because the third one was out of the county that day. The President of the Board, when I explained to him how dire it was and how desperate we were to get these contracts signed, "We're losing teachers. Is there any way you can give me a commitment of what you're going to do so I can relay that back to Mr. Dunkle and we get on with the work ahead?"

He finally, after a considerable time, I heard the story loud and clear, "Well you know we're spending too much money on education. I only went to the 5th grade in school, and I've been very successful." He was also very lucky. A wonderful person. I wouldn't in any way try to denigrate him and downsize his importance. That was the attitude in those days. Education was not a priority, not a serious consideration to some of our leadership. Anyway he finally, after a considerable conversation with him, he wrote a figure down on a piece of paper. He said, "If you can get one more Commissioner to agree to this, that's what we'll do."

I get on my horse. No. I get in my car and I drove down to the other Commissioner who's in the First District. I called his wife and she said, "He's out on a tractor, but you come on down. He'll talk to you." I went down, had a nice talk with him and explained to him. When I showed him the figure, he said, "That figure's wrong. We didn't agree to that much." I said, "Well that's the figure that your colleague gave me, the President of the Board, gave me. He said if I could get someone else to agree with that, that would be the finality of the budget."

After considerable conversation, I said, "Well there's one thing I'm not going to do in my life, if I know. I'm not going to misrepresent the facts. I'm telling you that's what he wrote down. That's his handwriting." Then he agreed. I went back to the Superintendent of Schools at that time and told him two people that had agreed to it. What we did was illegal, but we didn't have a choice because you knew you have to hold public hearings. You ought to know. Article 25 is very defined on what you have to do in order to meet the covenants of the law. We finally got that settled down anyway. "We don't have a choice."

We signed contracts. We did not have an official document saying, "This is going to be your budget for the year." That was the year we lost 40% of our teachers because it was so indefinite. They felt insecure. We really didn't have a choice. We had to do something. It was a serious story, but I thought it had a bit of levity in it you know, the way it was handled.

Wilson:

It demonstrates your leadership, not only when the schools were integrated. I remember at my graduation, you were the speaker at my graduation. The motivating message you had about "You can make a difference." You also encouraged us to come back to Calvert County, wherever we went, to come back to Calvert County and make a difference in Calvert County. Your leadership on the School Board level, there was a connection with School Board and the state.

Years later when you supported me and was successful in getting me appointed to the School Board, I also served on the Maryland Association of Boards of Education. As I was researching the history, I saw that you also served on that Executive Committee there. Tell me about, second poorest county in the state. You not only demonstrated leadership here, but you also participated at the state level in the Boards of Education Association.

MARYLAND ASSOCIATION OF BOARDS OF EDUCATION

Senator Fowler: I recall so vividly of serving on the Maryland Association of Boards of Education. In fact, I had reached the plateau of first Vice President. I would have been President the next year. I declined that because all during this period of time I was on the Board of Education, I had a lot of affection for the educational system. I wanted it to improve and, in doing so, you really needed to, I thought at that time and I really wasn't that inclined to become a politician. I felt that if you wanted people to listen to you, you had to have a station, you had to have a base from which you voiced your opinion and your plans and your vision.

I decided I'd run for County Commissioner. That's one thing that got me moving in that. I told them regretfully up there, that I would decline the Presidency of the Maryland Association of the Boards of Education because of the reasons I've just mentioned, that I was interested in politics. I wanted to get into the situation where I could help to improve education, improve health, bring recreation to the county, strong public safety, and certainly the love of my life, one of the loves of my life, the Patuxent River. At that time it was in decline.

I wanted to make sure that I had some authority behind me when I spoke in order to try to bring restoration back to that very productive body of water. Anyway, the Board of Education was a great experience. Serving in the Navy was also a great experience. I learned a lot. It was just the highlight of my life. It kind of helped to mold me for the future that was surely to come. I will never forget the integration schools.

We had some real characters in this county. Still do. Most of them had passed away by then. I had more threats on the telephone, Wilson, you would not believe. That's why I left the phone off the hook at nighttime when I'd go to bed. Oh man, they were adamant. They most of them wanted to start a private school.

Wilson: Tell me a little bit about, I guess your campaign in '69 and '70-

Senator Fowler: Yes. It really got rolling in the early part of '70. It was different in those days. You didn't start two years ahead of time.

Wilson: Right.

PROBLEMS FACING CALVERT COUNTY

Senator Fowler:

At any rate, if we think back to the days on the Board of Education and of course the one overriding factor in my life was that I had a very affectionate and abiding interest in Calvert County and what it was going to be like down the road. That experience on the Board of Education really taught me and helped to build the kind of leadership within me, that I needed to actually to meet the task ahead. Remembering now that Calvert County, as I mentioned earlier, was a poor county, poor educational system. We had a hospital that was barely meeting the needs. They were doing the best they could under the circumstances.

There were no recreational fields, no softball fields, basketball courts or any of that. Very, very limited opportunities for kids to recreate other than on school property. There was a lot of things. Then I could see the bridge coming at Solomons Island. I could see the dualization being completed on Route 4. You didn't have to be a rocket scientist to understand that when things happen like this, and then we were anticipating this large sum of money coming in from Baltimore Gas and Electric at that time. All of those things kept going around in my mind.

Somebody has got to step up to the plate and set the pace, set the compass, box the compass the way we want it so that we can meet the demands that are necessary for the county to be a good county and to provide the amenities. It was all infrastructure that we were thinking about. I'm thinking in order to do that, you got to be in the County Commissioner's seat. After all, everything happening in Calvert County doesn't happen unless the local Board of County Commissioners, unless it's a private organization. You need the support of the County Commissions. I feel that's the place to be.

I chose then to file for County Commissioner, with all of what I like to think of was a sound vision coming down the road. When I was elected, it was not a real close election. I was elected. At that time, your peers elected you as President. I served for nine consecutive years as President of the Board of County Commissioners. There are several things that I did, in the very beginning, when I became a County Commissioner.

First and foremost, I wanted a transparent government. No more Executive meetings unless it was absolutely essential. I think we

had about 11 Executive meetings while I was President of the Board of County Commissioners because I wanted the public that elected me to know what was going on in the government. They didn't have to make an appointment to come in and see the County Commissioners. They walked in, listened to a meeting as long as they wanted to, and walk out. There was no restrictions whatsoever.

Then another thing, and I may have mentioned this earlier in the earlier part of the interview, was that I also wanted to build a help to build or set in place the things that would be ... I don't like to use the word moral, but I would like to see government gain some morality in terms of how they functioned and all. My first moves that I made, first and foremost, was to talk with the other 2 Commissioners and see if they had an objection to me bringing in a minister to open public meetings up with a prayer and Pledge of Allegiance. They were gung-ho ready to go forward; two very nice people to work with. We started with that.

The other thing that I asked him to do was seriously consider approving the placement of some kind of recording devices. We didn't have the fancy TV stuff that they have now. "Let's record those meetings so that for years to come. In other words, to record them for posterity so that anyone can come in here anytime they want and request a meeting, they can listen verbatim to what was said and what went on in that meeting." We succeeded in doing both of those. I always felt that was very important because we all need a little bit of supervision. If you are too secluded, you can become a little careless in what you do.

If you've got 20,000 bosses watching you, it gives you the encouragement you need to conduct yourself in a manner that we would like to think would be a national trend, so that government by the people and of the people and for the people, truly is present and the right thing to do. That was the transition from the Board of Education to the Board of County Commissioners. One of the early things we did was to, because at that time we had no subdivision regulations in the county. We had very limited building inspection and all the amenities that you'd need to attract people to the county, that didn't bring a wake of problems with them, we were absent of. How do we do that?

We just shut down everything. We had a public meeting. Did everything proper. We put a moratorium on the subdivision of

any land in Calvert County whatsoever until such time as we could get a plan in place. That plan was in place within about a year. We opened the gate up again. I really believe that was we had many people that helped us on that. It was about 400 people altogether. We had professional planners that put it all together and put it in a book. It was called the Pleasant Peninsula Plan. That plan was I think one of the better moves we made because it set the stage. That plan set the stage for the future of Calvert County.

In other words, we settled in 1654. The theme of that is, "What do you want to be like in the year 2000." Which is long past, but that was long ahead then. We're talking about 1970, 30 years later. It was a joy to be a part of that and to watch the kind of talent that we had in this county, bring them together. We broke up into Commissions. They chose whatever Commission they wanted to serve on, turned that plan in.

That was my compass all the time I was in office, that plan. "People in this county put this plan together. We're going to do all we possibly can to make sure that we adhere to it and not ignore that in any way to indicate that this was just an exercise in futility." We wanted it to work. I believe it did work pretty well.

Wilson:

It did. Quite frankly, the first comprehensive plan in Calvert County. I also recall you leading that effort and the passion you had for looking beyond where we are, where we were at the time, looking out 30 years and not only in terms of zoning but, "What do you want Calvert County to look like?" I personally really appreciate your leadership in that area.

In terms of Commissioner, when you were Commissioner, the power plant was, a nuclear power plant was under construction, the only nuclear power plant in the State of Maryland, the only one basically in the area. Tell me about that experience. Did we have 100% support or were people concerned about the uncertainty of nuclear power? Clearly we worked through all those issues, but you were the one in the leadership seat when all that actually took place.

PLANNING FOR NUCLEAR POWER PLANT

Senator Fowler:

One of the exciting times in our early tour of duty as County Commissioners was the nuclear power plant, which was being constructed by Baltimore Gas and Electric. I recall the first public hearing I attended was a hearing that had been challenged by environmental groups. They were determined to stop that nuclear power plant. We had 90% support locally here. The opposition was coming from external forces. One lady from the eastern shore was one of the ring leaders. The regulatory agency heard all of their complaints and everything. Then ultimately they ruled in favor of the nuclear power plant.

We anticipated that happening and knew we were going to have the resources we needed to go ahead and construct the different things that we needed to make Calvert County a receptive place to come to, a pleasant place to live, and yet to try to minimize the problems that sometimes are inherent with growth. I think, in large measure, with the help of many good people, we were able to accomplish that. Our first budget in 1970, this is astounding was, if memory serves me correct, was just a little over \$4 million, the entire budget. The first check that I was presented from Baltimore Gas and Electric was for \$7,500,000, almost twice what our budget was at that time.

We were able to use that wisely because of the plan we had put in place. Everything worked out good at the nuclear power plant. It got off, the first unit got off without a hitch and so did the second unit a few years' later. It enabled us to do exactly some of the things that we had in that plan. We started off with strong support of the hospital. They wanted to build a new hospital. At that time, the estimate for the new hospital was going to be about \$8 million. As still is the case, any bond issue like that has to be approved through the legislature in Annapolis. The bond was set.

PLANNING AND FUNDING FOR NEW HOSPITAL

The Senate at that time introduced the bill and got the bond approved for \$8 million. Now a couple years later when they got nearing the time to go to work on the hospital plans and everything, they had some estimates that didn't agree with the bond. It was 12 million instead of 8 million. We were \$4 million shy. The authority at that time in Annapolis simply said, "You

asked for \$8 million. We approved \$8 million. You're going to build an \$8 million hospital." That was a very abrupt way of doing it, but that's the way it was. Now, as you well know, again under Article 25, we don't have the authority to provide funds for a private, non-profit organization.

The Calvert Memorial Hospital, which was known as Calvert County Hospital at the time, was no exception. There was no way we could give them the money. There was no way that we could loan them the money. It just was illegal to do so. They were in a dilemma because now they're going to have to reduce the quality of the hospital because they've got to meet this \$8 million ceiling. I recall so well, Fred Donovan, who has passed many years ago. He was a wonderful person. He was a great community person; quiet but very smart and served us well in World War II. He was a commissioned officer in the Marine Corps. He did a good job for us in World War II. He and I had a nice conversation one time.

He said, "You know you've got to find a way to help us out. There's no other way we can get the money. We can't raise that kind of money." Time went on and a light bulb went off in my mind. I just said, "You know they're going to have a building left over up there once they build this new hospital. Would it be possible for the County Commissioners then to lease that building for a long period of time, advancing the \$4 million so they can go ahead and get the hospital built the way they wanted to."

Judge Bowen has a brother, who is passed now, who was a very bright attorney. His name was Lowell Bowen. I called him and talked with him personally on the phone. I told him, I said "I didn't want the word to get out down here, but I do need a positive legal opinion." I let him know what we were thinking about it. He called me back a couple days later, he called me back. He had done all the research. He says, "You got the green flag. You can do it. Just do it right and you're okay." We held a public hearing and ended up leasing the old hospital for a period of years.

I forgot the years now, 20 years or something like that, for \$4 million, with no intent of ever using that building for anything significant. There was some County Commissioners that thought it should be converted into a county office building. We fought that very hard. In fact, fought it so hard that it ended up in court. Again, my side was fortunate enough to win.

Wilson: Great.

Senator Fowler: We went ahead and ultimately you know what happened to the old hospital. It got demolished and was put in a landfill, which was a good place for it. It didn't belong in the front of that hospital up there because when that land was purchased many years ago, the doctor that had the vision for that, he saw that as a health community.

That entire 56 acres at that time, was to be used for health purposes only; the hospital, health department, nursing home, whatever we needed to support the health of the community. That materialized quite well. But it didn't come without some manipulating, all of which was perfectly proper and legal. We had very limited opposition to it, very limited opposition to it. I recall-

Wilson: Good history of that how we got that hospital. I remember the old one. I remember the funding for the new one. Again, your leadership made that happen.

Senator Fowler: I had Dr. George Weems, who's on the ... He was really the spark for the health. Anytime we had a health problem, we'd say, "Doc what do you think about this?" He would always give you good, sound advice. In most cases, we followed his advice. That was a moment of success that has never had regrets. I recall later on, when they discussed the indebtedness. The Board of County Commissioners at that time, you may have been on the Board at that time. At any rate, the hospital had asked them to excuse the indebtedness.

Wilson: Before I got on.

Senator Fowler: Before you got on, okay.

Wilson: I remember that though.

Senator Fowler: They asked me if I would testify in favor of that. I went to the public hearing they had. What had happened, when they agreed, the majority of the Board agreed to do it. The minority of the Board protested excusing the debt. They were in a dilemma. My testimony was very short. I just simply said that "There's nobody sitting up in your seat that doesn't want to see this hospital succeed. Nobody. You love that hospital. You want to do what's right. Your attorney's already told you that you took action

without having a public meeting, like you should have. Admitting you were wrong, why don't you just, for the purposes and for the good of all concerned, why don't you just resolve to say, 'We made a mistake. We didn't do it properly.

After thinking it over, we definitely want to help the hospital' and get on with it." A number of other people testified. Then after that, they did change their mind and agreed to excuse the indebtedness. The hospital was key. The hospital was key to the growth in the county because people coming here from X, Y, Z, some of the things they're going to want to know. What kind of education system do you have in Calvert County? What about if my wife gets sick or one of my children gets sick, what kind of health facilities do you have? What's the crime rate in Calvert County? Do you have police down there to protect me, take care of the people and keep the crime rate down? All of these things is what they look at.

That really, in a nutshell, was what we was trying to do. We were trying to build a infrastructure that would attract the kind of people that would be an asset to the country, rather than to be a deficit. We right now have in this county some of the most talented people you'll find anywhere in the United States of America, right here in Calvert County. I'm proud. Of course, I'm old fashioned. If I had my way, I'd like to go back to the old days. You knew everybody in the county. That's past tense. What we have to do is to be very neighborly and to provide the kind of tender loving care and friendship that people expect when they move into a new neighborhood, new community.

PLANNING FOR TRANSPORTATION

Wilson: Two more things I want you to talk about that happened when you were County Commissioner. One was during the '70s. I mention this because we talked earlier about the Department of Transportation. The Department of Transportation was created during the '70s, created in '73, at a time when we were building infrastructure; state road, dualizing Route 4 and changing it from 416 to Route 4, if you recall.

Senator Fowler: Right.

Wilson: Building a bridge. At that time, the First Secretary of Transportation, later became Governor, Governor Hughes. I know

he was a friend of yours. You guys worked together when you later became Senator. It was a time when, as you said, the second poorest county in the state, you're needing a lot of resources. You had dollars coming in from the power plant. We were successful in getting that bridge connecting Calvert and St. Mary's County. Talk a little bit about that because you were right in the middle of that. It was also you had the power plant coming in. Later you had activity coming on the naval base across on the St. Mary's side. You were a leader at that point, as a County Commissioner, as a lot of that stuff was going on.

Senator Fowler:

It was a time of challenge for all of us. What we wanted to do, quite frankly, was to not become spendthrifts. We wanted to be as conservative as we could. We also knew investments had to be made because, like you mentioned, the bridge coming in, the dualization of Route 4 and all. Never in my wildest dreams did I ever think I'd have the opportunity to serve with a Governor that was as noble and decent as Governor Harry Hughes. We've had great governors since then. I'm not in any way demeaning them. He was a special person, the kind of fellow that you sat down and you'd talk with. When he told you something, that's the way it was. There was no pull back.

He was so instrumental in my success because we did become very good friends. We are to this day very good friends. I call him every Christmas if I don't get to see him. The age factor's taken a hold on both of us. We still enjoy and have reciprocal admiration for each other because he did the kind of things that I like to see people in government do. He was a kind of a person that you could depend on. No shifting sand with Harry. What you saw is what you got. He became Governor actually because he failed to be obedient to the Governor at that time.

There was a contract, and this was public information, there was a contract. He was instructed to award that contract, he being Governor Hughes, was instructed to award that contract, by the Governor at that time, to a person whose bid was much higher than the one that he awarded it to. Before he would do that, he resigned. That really is what stimulated him to seek public office. Nobody thought he had a chance in the world winning it, but it turned out he was very successful. He was a great leader. We could always depend on him.

When he was Secretary of Transportation, you could depend on him, but when he was Governor of the State of Maryland, he was just such a big help in working with him and helping to move things that needed to be moved. He was right there with us. He's irreplaceable, Harry, I guess you'd call him.

MARYLAND ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES

Wilson:

He was the one that appointed me to the Board of Education, both at the local level and state level. My citations that I have at home has Governor Hughes' name at the bottom. The other thing that was going on, and you found time to do this. I realize that you were leading Calvert County through a transition during the '70s.

You found time to also connect with the State Association. You did that as a School Board member. You also did that as a County Commissioner. You participated and you were active at the Maryland Association of Counties. In 1975, you became President. Now you had a lot to do down here. Tell me about why was it important for you to make that connection and the leadership that we saw here in Calvert County, you also demonstrated that at MACo.

Senator Fowler:

Actually in serving in a number of roles in the state and the county here, the service that I had with the Maryland Association of Counties, I don't think I had any particular desire to become an officer, but I was asked to. The Executive Director at that time, his name was Joseph Murnane. He was a wonderful leader. He's the one that pulled me aside one time and he said, "You know Bernie says you have some leadership qualities. We really need people to step up to the plate. How about getting in line as an officer in the Maryland Association of Counties? I'd like to see you lead the Association someday."

That was the reason I got started in it. It was also another way to make connections with all the local government throughout the State of Maryland. I didn't anticipate at that time going to the Senate. I just didn't, the reapportionment changed my mind on that. It was a time that really helped to shape the kind of things that I needed to get things done for Calvert County statewide. Many of those people that I served with in local government later on I served with in Annapolis. We had strong connection.

I was very fortunate I've been very fortunate all of my life, very blessed, I've had the opportunity to do that because there was nothing in it, nor did I want anything out of it, other than the satisfaction of knowing that I was doing the right thing. You could say that in a hurry but it's so important. Just do what's right. That's what's important in this life. That's I guess is the product or the reward that I got out of serving with the Maryland Association of Counties. You became a household name throughout the state. You were able to talk with people of all walks of life. That was a big, big asset for me.

I recall when I left the county after 12 years, I felt we were in pretty good shape. We had brought in three recreational parks. We had a new hospital. We had put the sheriff's department in police cars, marked police cars. The list goes on and on. All of those things happened for the betterment of the people that lived in this county and for those that were choosing to live here. It's just been a wonderful experience for me. The journey has been long and sometimes it's been very challenging. The reward for being a small part of bringing the county to the forefront, where it belonged, and providing as best we could those things that were exceedingly necessary to make Calvert the wonderful place that it is to live.

Wilson: I know you know this. You were the first MACo President from Calvert County.

Senator Fowler: I think I was the first MACo President, correct, in southern Maryland, in the Tri-County area. Yes. That was an honor that I didn't necessarily feel I deserved. It was one that history records it that way and that's the way it is. It was a joy serving and a great time for me to improve on my ability and to hopefully try to set an example that would be an advantage and not a disadvantage to the people that I serve.

Wilson: You mentioned the reapportionment, the census of 1980, and the opportunity it afforded you to seek office at the state level. There are a lot of things that happened during the time you were at the state level from 1983 to 1994. Tell me about that transition. You were President of the County Commissioners. You probably could have been reelected two or three more times down here. You decided to make that transition to the state level.

RUNNING FOR MARYLAND SENATE

Senator Fowler:

I enjoyed all of my work as a Board of Education member and as a County Commissioner and as a Maryland State Senator. I also enjoyed in the interim offices that I held, with the Maryland Association of Boards of Education and the Maryland Association of Counties. All of those were elements to help me grow and to become the kind of person that I wanted to be. I am not a real staunch advocate of term limits but, for me, I thought it was appropriate. I set 12 years as a maximum that I would serve in any one station. I figured I should be able to get done in 12 years what I was capable of doing. I would exhaust my talent at that time and either move out of government or move up in government.

The reapportionment afforded that opportunity for me. That didn't come without some strong encouragement from people like retired Judge Tom Rymer, who's a dear friend. He was in the House of Delegates at the time. I kept after him, "Now you're already up here, why don't you shift around to the Senate?" "No. I want you to run for the Senate." The reapportionment allowed that. We had Calvert, Charles, and St. Mary's at that time. We had 50% of the population is in St. Mary's County. The other 50% was in Calvert County and southern Ann Arundel County.

If I'd have had the opportunity to pick geographical areas that would have been pleasing and a joy to me, they were the areas because I didn't know when I left Calvert County and went into St. Mary's County. I did the same thing with Anne Arundel County. I was a part of the family up there. We ran for the Office of Senate. I was successfully elected. Won in a primary and won very handily in the general election. There again, I had set my target for 12 years. I think it could have been reelected for a 4th term, but I made it, one year in advance, I made the announcement at the Calvert County Courthouse that I had served my time and I was not going to retire from activities, I was going to retire from the Senate.

I wanted to do that to give everybody a chance to go ahead and run if they wanted for the seat. Those 12 years in the Senate were quite an experience for me. From an environmental standpoint, one of the things that I remember so succinctly was that I wanted to see some environmental education taught in the schools. At that time, it was very, very limited. There might have been a school here and there in the state where a teacher had a real

affection or desire for the environment. They, on their own volition, would teach kids a little bit about the Patuxent River, the Chesapeake Bay. I wanted something more comprehensive than that.

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION LEGISLATION

One of the important bills that I introduced while I was up there was to mandate environmental education K-12 in all public schools in the State of Maryland. It passed the Senate very handily. In fact I had 24, 25 sponsors on the bill with me. Then it got over in the House. The House of Delegates, the Environmental Matters Committee at that time, had a ruling that if ... They had an ironclad ruling they would not mandate education in the State of Maryland. That was the job for the State Board of Education.

Regretfully, the Chairman talked to me. We had a very serious conversation, lovely lady. She said, "If there's anything I can do to help you, I will. I could tell you, your bill is not going to come out of the House. Your bill is going to die in the House. It's not going. We just cannot break that covenant. We agreed that we would not mandate education in the State of Maryland and we will not. As much as I'd love to help you, I can't do it." What's plan 2 then on that particular bill? It reached a point where I got to thinking, "Well you know my good friend, Wilson Parran, is a member of the State Board of Education now. At least I have one friendly face up there."

I knew Dr. Hornbeck very well. He came to the Budget and Taxation Committee all the time. You know how they come in for the budget. We got to know each other pretty well. The next plan was to lock on with a dear friend of mine, Senator Gerald Winegrad, a great environmentalist. He agreed to go up with me to the hearing. We made the appointment and came up. I remember I'll always remember that smile you had on your face when I walked in there. You still have it today. As a result of that hearing that day and our proposal, we were able to ... I got a phone call not too long after that, just a few weeks after that, Dr. Hornbeck told me that the State Board of Education had agreed.

He didn't tell me unanimously, but I understand it was unanimous, that they had agreed to, through a decree or whatever, they were going to put environmental education in every classroom in the State of Maryland, K-12, in all public

schools. Today it's up and running. I just get a joy out of talking with the kids in the school. I do wade ins with them. It's a real good feeling that you have when you look back over that and see the lives that you've had a little opportunity to influence and to see how they grow. They can talk the Chesapeake Bay. They can tell you there's 64,000 square miles of watershed in the Chesapeake Bay. They can tell you the states involved. They can tell you about submerged aquatic vegetation.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES IN PATUXENT RIVER

I know when I first got started on that, I couldn't spell eutrophication. I didn't know what it was. The folks at Chesapeake Biological Lab are the ones that helped me out and got me rolling on that. That's for another time I guess. Anyway, I appreciated the time I was in the Senate. We had the mandatory wastewater treatment bill that went in that actually mandated that the 10 major plants meet certain standards by certain date. If they didn't, fines kicked in. They charged them so much a pound for nitrogen, so much a pound for phosphorus, over the level, the TMDL, that we had set for those plants. Governor Harry Hughes, I go back to him because the federal government at that time was not convinced that nitrogen was a factor.

They had done a study, it was called the Hydro Qual Study. It was supposed to be a very exact. The science was supposed to be the exact thing that was going on. They came back with a report. It was a Professor Brown who was in charge of that. He said that nitrogen was not a problem in the Patuxent River. Phosphorus was, but not nitrogen. The federal government drew back. They said, "Nitrogen's not a problem according to the study. We won't participate in any of the funding." That was a big chunk of money. It took \$29 million to take the nitrogen out of western branch, which is probably the largest plant on the Patuxent River, of the 10 major plants.

There are probably 35 or more plants altogether. The rest of them are below 500,000 gallons a day. I mentioned that. That's when we had the rockfish moratorium, which saved the rockfish. We had the phosphate ban. Some very important environmental issues and also we had some good bills that were very helpful to Calvert County. Calvert Marine Museum is one that comes to mind. We were able to get a bond bill passed for \$1 billion for them. That gave them an opportunity to put up a new building.

They were in the old school down there. Lots of things that you get to have a hands-on exercise with. You look back over your shoulder and you kind of feel, in a humble way, proud of those things that occurred.

Wilson:

I find that you started with the Board of Education. You went to the County Commissioners. You went to the state. You made that connection with the need to improve education through the environmental curriculum that you put in place. At the time you were in the Senate, there were a lot of reports that came out on education at the time, if you remember. There was the Children at Risk. There was the accountability or talk about maintenance of effort.

You were passionate about where we lived in the state, the waters around us, and the need to clean that up. As you mentioned, you put in a bill and because of that structure of not getting involved in setting curriculum by the General Assembly, you didn't give up. You went to the State Board. You mentioned that day, and I want to just mention too that it was great to look at and see a pleasant person bringing an issue that we need to address. Now we, as members of the State Board, knew that this is a good idea. We need to move it forward.

It was easy when you came in. I think the votes were already there. We held a public hearing so I could listen to you to tell us what we already knew you were going to say because you were passionate about that. Thanks again for your leadership in that area. That is something that's in schools today throughout the state and the importance of our waterways and our environment to the success of our state and the future of our state. I thank you for that.

Senator Fowler:

I want to thank you for what you did because your smile that day when I walked in that room was assurance to me. You have that chemistry when you're doing things. I had a good feeling when I walked in the room that, "These are good people and I've got a cherished friend that I know is going to help accelerate the support for this program."

Wilson:

It's great I could help you make a difference in that there in environmental education. Now in '83 through '94, you're in the Senate. Then you left the Senate. You ran for, you were on a ticket

for one of the candidates going through the primary for Governor, Lieutenant Governor, with American Joe I think.

CAMPAIGN FOR LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

Senator Fowler: American Joe Miedusiewski.

Wilson: Yes. Tell us about that experience of running as a candidate at the gubernatorial level.

Senator Fowler: I really, when I retired from Senate, I thought at that time, that was going to be the end of my political life. I was very willing to accept that. A fellow by the name of American Joe Miedusiewski, from Baltimore, came to me. He said, "I'm going to run for Governor. We've already filed. We have a committee set up. We keep talking about the 2nd man, the Lieutenant Governor. Everybody's finger is pointing at Bernie Fowler. I'm here to ask you if you'll consider serving as Lieutenant Governor." What do I have to lose? It would be another experience in my life.

We did that and it was a lot of fun. I recall I had a friend in the county here that we really weren't close friends. He was much younger than I, but he had a plane of his own. He had it, I guess it was at a little airport, a little air strip up in Lower Marlboro. That's where he kept his plane. He came and volunteered to fly me anywhere in the state that I had to go to to a campaign. I recall so vividly the first opportunity I had to take him up on it was the Tawes Clam Bake over in Crisfield. I went over there with no illusion that I was going to be greeted by everybody on the Eastern Shore, although I had some good friends there, and still do. We got into the little plane.

I took my son with me. We flew on over there. Wherever I wanted to go, he would fly me there so I wouldn't lose a lot of time on the highways. That was a great part of the campaign. We didn't have any money. We got started so late. There was only 6 months or so before the election. The latest date that you could file, that's when we filed. Like I say, we had a pretty good field of candidates too. There was probably half a dozen running for it. Don't you know, we finished up in 2nd place. That to me was success. That was an accomplishment.

Calvert County carried me solid, carried us solid, I should say, Joe and I. It was the only county in Maryland that we carried like that.

It was good to know that the people at home here hadn't forgotten Bernie and they were willing to take a chance on me because I had a proven record here. Great experience that was.

Wilson:

One of the things that happened when you were in the Senate happened during your sophomore year. I'm not sure whether a lot of people know about this. You were chosen to recite the George Washington address that he delivered in the old Senate chambers in 1783, when he resigned his commission as Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army. Tell me a little bit about that, that honor, that experience.

GEORGE WASHINGTON SPEECH TO MARYLAND SENATE

Senator Fowler:

In the Senate, they have a tradition every George Washington's birthday. They always have, they select a Senator to make a speech about George Washington on that date. They convened in the old Senate chambers which, incidentally, is the oldest Senate chambers in the United States of America. That's where General Washington at that time resigned his commission. They have a symbol, a big star up there where he stood when he did that. It's tradition to have a Senator make a speech on George Washington's birthday. It is quite an honor.

If you think in terms of the odds of that happening, there are 47 Senators. You'd have to stay there 47 years if each one had a chance to do it. You and I know that's almost an impossibility. I was very flattered and honored to do that. I always had some people that I could count on to do a little historical review and give me some outline, some notes to use. This was not an exceptional case. I always used good resources when I could. I made the speech. They tell me it was pretty good. I had the pleasure of having my wife was up with me and my grandson. They sat with the First Lady of the Senate, the President of the Senate.

They sat over by the window. The ledges are real wide. They sat in those. It was kind of fun. When you stand up there at the lectern, not too far from where George Washington stood, all of a sudden, you get this feeling of, "This is really a part of history. I mean General George Washington, who became the first President of the United States and here I am standing within a few feet of where he stood, actually reciting some wonderful things about his leadership and what he meant to the United States of America."

That was an experience that I shall never forget and one that I will greatly appreciate with a deep sense of humility for having the honor of doing it.

Wilson: I want to thank you for your service to Calvert County, to the State of Maryland. I know what it takes when you're in public office. You've done it with strong leadership. You've created an environment in the state where even today, I know people come to you for advice in terms of what would you do if you were in that situation? That demonstrates the leadership that you have and the wisdom that you have and your willingness to share that with others over the many years. I want to thank you for this opportunity to sit and reflect on parts of your political career. Did I leave out anything in terms of my questions or comments?

Senator Fowler: After you go back up to your Deputy Secretary station in Annapolis or you're in Baltimore aren't you?

Wilson: Hanover, yes.

Senator Fowler: Hanover, yeah. I'll think of half a dozen things. That's okay.

Speaker 3: Take notes. We will get them-

Senator Fowler: We'll get them, yeah. It's been my pleasure to enjoy your friendship and your leadership, which was very dominant for a long period of time and still is in the station you're currently in. You're making powerful allies. I guess in some places, you make a few enemies, just like I did.

Wilson: Yes. You can't satisfy everybody.

Senator Fowler: I remember when we declared that moratorium on the subdivision of land in Calvert County. Names I'll not mention. I had one man come in and shook his finger in my face. Didn't even ask the secretary if he could come in and just barged into my office and said, "You'll never live to get back in this office. You're ruining this county. You might as well put up a wall across Route 4 and stop people from coming here. Do you realize what you're doing?" I says, "Yes I do. I'm going to make millionaires out of all of you. You're buying land now for \$50 an acre. Trust me. See what it's like down the road a decade or two." You and I have a pretty good recall of the appreciation of land and the values in this county here.

Wilson: I appreciate your mentorship and also the role model that you set for ... You set the bar high when it came to political office and what should be expected of someone that's a public servant. I try to live up to that. It was good to have that model out there. I recall when I first walked into the MACo office. They have the pictures around the wall of all of the Presidents of MACo. I'm looking around, "Ah, I know that guy." And also I appreciate when I became President of MACo in 2009 and the dinner that we had over in the Hyatt in Cambridge. You were there.

Senator Fowler: Yes.

Wilson: You and your wife was there when I was being-

Senator Fowler: Installed, yeah.

Wilson: ... as President.

Senator Fowler: Yeah.

Wilson: I appreciate your support over the years. We all have benefited in Calvert County because we had a statesman like Bernie Fowler.

Senator Fowler: I'm flattered and honored and I can't tell you how grateful I am for you so graciously passing my way. It's meant a lot to me and will continue to mean a lot to me.

Wilson: Thank you.

Senator Fowler: I appreciate your time today and I hope that, out of this little gathering here, that when the producer puts it all together that it may just resurrect some of the culture that you and I experienced when we were going through it. This United States of America is the greatest place on earth. To say that I'm totally pleased with the kind of culture we're experiencing now, and some of the behavior patterns, would be a ridiculously inaccurate statement, so our work is still ongoing, Mr. Secretary.

Wilson: Absolutely.

Senator Fowler: Our challenges are still there. As long as our great Creator, our Heavenly Father, gives us the breath and keeps the old heart going and the brain working, there will always be an opportunity to do His work here on earth. That's what we've tried to do.

Wilson: I truly believe that we all are put here for a reason. Our paths have crossed for a reason-

Senator Fowler: Yes.

Wilson: I thank God that I have had that opportunity to spend some time with Bernie Fowler-

Senator Fowler: Thank you. Thank you very much.

Wilson: Sure.