Doug Wilder's First Year As Lieutenant Governor

by

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(ABSTRACT)

In 1989, L. Douglas Wilder became the first black American to be elected Governor in any state when he was elected Governor of Virginia. His victory was the fruit of labors that spanned a twenty year political career. He entered politics at a time when Virginia was emerging from the control of a political machine headed by Harry Byrd, Sr.

The win in 1989 was the direct result of Wilder being able to position himself while serving as the Commonwealth’s Lieutenant Governor. Specifically crucial was Wilder’s first year in office. During that period, he was able to establish himself as an independent voice. In doing so, he distanced himself from the questionable policies of Governor Gerald Baliles. Wilder’s boldness deterred others from challenging his nomination in 1989. In addition, Wilder demonstrated that he could overcome political troubles, such as criticism he received for accepting speaking fees from in-state organizations.

Wilder’s success can be explained by a marketing theory known as positioning. That theory holds that politicians have to create an independent position in the public eye. In doing so, the candidate may have to reinvent himself or herself to appeal to the widest range of voters.
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Finally, my wife Tracy has been my ally, colleague and best friend
from the start, and she has taught me about the most important things. She has also made the writing process more enjoyable by giving a proud father a healthy baby girl. For those reasons, this thesis is dedicated to her.
# Table of Contents

Introduction ..............................................1
Chapter 1-Virginia and Doug Wilder Come of Age.........5
Chapter 2-Settling Into Office............................20
Chapter 3-Gearing Up for the Big Fight..................37
Chapter 4-The Big Fight................................57
Epilogue-And the Rest Is History.........................73
Bibliography.............................................76
Introduction

As Doug Wilder sat his sights on running for Governor in 1989, the Old Dominion had changed greatly from the days of Harry Byrd, and even from the days of Mills Godwin. Black-belt whites no longer ran southern politics. Industrialization had brought about the rise of a middle class conservatism born in the suburbs. In Virginia, suburban Fairfax County contained one-seventh of the state’s voters. Fiscal conservatism was still important, but just as important was progress on issues like education and race. Conservatism no longer embraced preservation of the social order as much as it embraced individualism. This new conservatism also brought about the rise of mass media campaigns in Virginia. The Commonwealth reflected the notion that politics are simply consumption, where candidates are bought and sold like other consumer goods.¹

If politics are consumption, then there needs to be a theory to explain political movement. In the case of Doug Wilder, that theory is positioning. This theory holds that today’s airwaves are filled with too many products for people to remember them all. To overcome this, buyers/voters prioritize products/candidates based on the things they feel most important. Thus, politicians need to develop an important position in people’s minds and develop it as their own before someone

else occupies the top slot for a particular position that is important to the electorate. In doing this a politician must reinvent himself.\textsuperscript{2}

This is what Wilder did during his first year as Lieutenant Governor. He invented a position that allowed him to run for Governor in 1989.

In examining Doug Wilder, other writers have pointed out that 1986 was a crucial year in Wilder's development. But, those writers have generally seen that year's developments in a negative light, and have not employed positioning theory to explain Wilder's actions. Dwayne Yancey, in concentrating on Wilder's 1985 campaign for Lieutenant Governor, argues that most of Wilder's positioning took place in 1987 and 1988, and claims that Wilder did nothing to help himself in 1986. Donald Baker, in his biography of Wilder, did recognize that Wilder was trying to create an independent position for himself in 1986. But, he views Wilder as weak and "mired in controversy" at the end of 1986. Margaret Edds, in her examination of Wilder's 1989 gubernatorial race, only saw Wilder trying to position himself as a populist during 1986, and focuses her writing on the events leading up to the 1989 elections.\textsuperscript{3}

None of the three writers use positioning theory to explain Wilder's actions.

This thesis will examine how Wilder positioned himself during the early part of his term as Lieutenant Governor. It will bring together

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the best parts of others like Eds and Baker and, with the use of positioning theory, demonstrate how Wilder carved out his territory for 1989. During 1986, Wilder established himself as a power in Virginia politics, separate from Chuck Robb or Gerald Baliles. In amassing that power base, Wilder demonstrated that he could overcome political hard times. On most issues, Wilder took populist stands. By building a base early, Wilder was able to win the 1989 nomination. The base of his nomination was founded in 1986. He tried to build a coalition of progressives who had supported him in earlier political forays, and fiscal conservatives. Thrown in with that coalition was blacks. In order to appeal to them, Wilder lashed out at Robb, who many blacks still distrusted to some extent. In addition, Wilder played on the moralism of many black voters, especially when he spoke out about social problems affecting the black community. The building of that coalition, and indeed the seeds of Wilder’s run in 1989, were sown in the first year of Wilder’s term as Lieutenant Governor. To understand the playing field in Virginia at the time, it is necessary to understand the system that Wilder came up in. Thus, this thesis will also survey the transformation of Virginia from Byrd oligarchy to two-party state.

Lieutenant Governors running for Governor were nothing new in Virginia. Mills Godwin and Fred Pollard had both used the office for a sounding board for their higher aspirations and as a means to consolidate their support. In fact, between 1965 and 1985, in every gubernatorial election, the sitting Lieutenant Governor had tried to run
for Governor. In this respect, Doug Wilder would be no different."

Historically, he would distinguish himself by becoming independent of the Governor he was serving under. Previous Lieutenant Governors had not been as outspoken as Wilder would be.

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Chapter 1—Virginia and Doug Wilder Come of Age

The inauguration in 1990 of L. Douglas Wilder as Virginia’s
governor was the climactic event in Virginia politics since World War
II. Much of Wilder’s success in the 1989 gubernatorial race can be
attributed to events that occurred before he received the Democratic
nomination in 1989. The first year of Wilder’s term as Lieutenant
Governor was characterized by Wilder preparing himself and Virginia’s
electorate for his historic campaign. That’s not to say that is all that
characterized his term. But, thoughts of 1989 did loom heavy over
Virginia politics in 1986. The 1989 campaign and Wilder’s ascension to
the governor’s mansion showed just how much Virginia had changed since
the era of the Byrd Machine.

Harry Byrd and his supporters came to dominate Virginia politics
in the 1920s. First a progressive governor, and then a conservative U.S.
Senator, Byrd remained in Virginia politics until 1965. He came up by
supporting the machine that existed before his, the machine controlled
by U.S. Senator Thomas Martin, and supported by Byrd’s influential
uncle, Hal Flood. In key elections, Byrd supported Machine-backed
candidates like Claude Swanson and E. Lee Trinkle. Later on, Trinkle
would prove an integral part of the Byrd team, along with Ebbie Combs
and Howard Smith.¹

¹Louis D. Rubin, Virginia: A History (New York: W. W. Norton and
Company, 1977), 162-63; Ronald L. Heinemann, Harry Byrd of Virginia
(Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 11-13; Heinemann
actually sees the Martin Machine as the first chapter of the Byrd Machine.
I see a break between the two in the middle 1920s when the Martin Machine
decayed and the Byrd Machine emerged from the political foray as the
dominant caste in Virginia politics.
Long before Byrd, Virginia had a tradition of politics being rooted in the localities. Byrd did not change this as his machine was centered at the local level. Under the Byrd machine, there was a bit of state unity, but not much. In addition to local control, voter disenfranchisement was the norm for Harry Byrd’s Virginia. Special targets to lose the vote were Republicans and blacks. This was done mostly through the poll tax that had to be paid six months before election day, and through a literacy test that was selectively applied to Byrd Democrats and harshly applied to others. This sometimes led to interesting results. In one case, a college graduate andRepublican in southwest Virginia failed the literacy test. The ironic notice he got said, “Yo hav fald to rechister.”

The small electorate and local control allowed the Byrd Machine to exert strong control over the political process. Much of this control was by black belt whites, although Byrd was from Winchester, an area with a relatively low number of blacks. In working one’s way up the ladder in Virginia politics, loyalty to Byrd and the machine was paramount. Byrd had the ultimate decision as to who the machine would support. But, he would listen to different opinions among his key supporters before making a decision. So, getting Byrd’s blessings also involved people pushing their name among local Byrd lieutenants. In

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addition to loyalty, Byrd also examined prospective candidates' electability and ability to unify the state's political elite. With Byrd's approval came the support of the Virginia aristocracy who controlled politics because of the small electorate.³

By the 1950s, challenges arose to the Byrd Machine. The Machine's failure to address those challenges by bringing in younger legislators, and the new electorate of the 1960s caused the machine to fade in power by the middle 1960s. As Ronald Heinemann writes in his biography of Harry Byrd, by the middle 1960s, Byrd "had lost his grasp of Virginia politics." Southern politics has generally entailed a conflict between the conservatives and those opposed to them. This conflict came to the fore in the 1960s. Voting rights reforms brought more people, especially blacks and Republicans, into the process. Bringing in more people helped to tie the Democratic party to its national counterpart. The Republicans began to emerge as the conservative party. This was a far cry from the 1940s when Harry Byrd's Democratic party was the only real party in Virginia politics.⁴

Demographic changes and court cases also shaped changes in Virginia politics during the 1960s. Urbanization and the evolution of one person—one vote caused the rural areas to lose complete sway over

the process. This urbanization had brought in Democrats and Republicans who were not big supporters of Massive Resistance to integration. It also caused the suburbs to come into being as a key to controlling Virginia politics.⁵

In addition to demographics, the federal courts forced Virginia to create an electoral system that reflected its population’s new realities. One of the most important cases was Davis v. Mann in 1964. This case mandated one person-one vote for General Assembly districts. Earlier in the same year, the court had already handed down Wesberry v. Sanders which mandated one person-one vote for Congressional districts. The anti-poll tax provisions of the 24th Amendment were extended to state elections in the 1966 decision, Harper v. State Board of Elections. By the end of the 1960s, a new Virginia electorate had emerged. Power rested in the hands of suburbanites from northern and eastern Virginia. This caused a new emphasis on issues like education and transportation.⁶

It was this period in which Doug Wilder entered Virginia politics. Wilder had been born in a segregated Virginia. At an early age, his parents pushed him to get an education. They practiced a discipline of self-reliance. He would read from the great philosophers and learn their works line by line. In order to pay for college at Virginia Union

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University, he waited tables at the John Marshall Hotel in downtown Richmond.  

After college, Wilder entered the U. S. Army and saw combat in the Korean War. While in Korea, Wilder won the Bronze Star for heroism in helping the United Nations forces take the area known as Pork Chop Hill. It was also during this time that Wilder flirted with black militance. He and some of his colleagues in the service were greatly affected by the rise in Africa of Kenyatta and his ideas about oppressed blacks violently throwing off the chains of their oppressors. In this sense, Wilder and his friends exchanged letters with the signature, "The Burning Spear." Today, Wilder plays down those actions as no more than the innocent ramblings of youth.  

After the war, Wilder tried to get a state job based on his merits as a college graduate with a degree in chemistry. At first, he was offered only a job as a cook. He finally got a job as a state toxicologist. This was something that Wilder found acceptable but not really that enthralling.  

In 1956, Wilder decided to become a lawyer. To accomplish this, he had to go outside of Virginia because the state’s law schools would admit only a few token blacks. He chose Howard University in Washington, DC. In 1959, Doug Wilder passed the Virginia Bar, the only black to do so that year. After passing the bar, Wilder set up a small practice in

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7 Dwayne Yancey, When Hell Froze Over, 26-28; Edds, Claiming the Dream, 21-32.
8 Ibid.
9 Yancey, When Hell Froze Over, 29; Edds, Claiming the Dream, 21-35.
his boyhood home, Church Hill, a traditionally black section of Richmond. Unlike many of Virginia's civil rights heroes, Wilder did not get known for pursuing high profile civil rights cases. Instead, he wanted to build a big firm centered on traditional criminal and civil cases. He used the 1960s to build such a practice. He went so far as to take low-profit, out of town work and break even so that he would have a higher name recognition. He did build a huge clientele. That clientele got so large that he simply could not keep pace. He did not take action on a case involving a couple involved a 1966 car wreck. His inaction led to a 1975 reprimand by the Virginia Supreme Court for "inexcusable procrastination and unprofessional conduct."¹⁰

Wilder did try to fight segregation in the courtroom. To flaunt the codes of courtroom segregation, he simply refused to sit in the "colored" section. On this, he was never challenged. But, Wilder concentrated more on his practice than being a civil rights crusader. Of the 1960s and his practice, Wilder says, "I never viewed myself as an activist."¹¹

Wilder first entered politics in 1969. The ascension of J. Sargeant Reynolds to the Lieutenant Governorship had created a vacancy

¹⁰Yancey, When Hell Froze Over, 29-31 (Supreme Court quote); Eds, Claiming the Dream, 21-35; Anthony Blaine Deel, "Virginia's Minimal Resistance: The Desegregation of Public Graduate and Professional Education, 1935-1955" (M.A. thesis, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 1990), 75-86, 102-108; Deel points out Gregory Swanson was admitted to the University of Virginia for graduate law studies in 1950. Moreover, in 1955, John Merchant enrolled in regular law courses at the University. But, Deel cautions that in the middle 1950s, black law students were only a few tokens who represented prominent black families. This definition did not apply to Doug Wilder.

¹¹Yancey, When Hell Froze Over, 29-30; Eds, Claiming the Dream, 21-35 (Wilder quote on 33).
in the Virginia Senate. This would be Wilder’s one chance because annexation by the city would soon cause the city to be too white for a black candidate to run. Wilder was one of the first candidates to announce. This was so that he could head of other black rivals. The Republicans nominated former Mayor Morrill Crowe while the Democrats did not nominate a candidate. Instead, the party chose to certify both Wilder and former Lieutenant Governor Fred Pollard as acceptable candidates.\(^{12}\)

When all of the votes were counted, Wilder was declared the winner. He carried 48 percent to Crowe’s 31 percent and Pollard’s 18 percent. White turnout was low and black turnout was high. Wilder got about 15 percent of the white vote. He was helped in getting the white vote by his stance in favor of annexation for the city. He argued that, in this manner, the city would have a larger tax base. He did say that this would mean there would need to be wards for the election of city council members. He was aided by the fact that the election took place before annexation brought in votes that he could not win.\(^{13}\)

Wilder was helped in the white community by some young businessmen who wanted to see the image of Virginia change. The ringleader of such efforts was Bob Butcher. Another was financier Iain O’Ferrall. Wilder did not run a "black" campaign. Instead, he tried to reach out to all Richmonders. He had an integrated campaign team with Bob Butcher and

\(^{12}\)Baker, Hold Fast to Dreams, 71; Edds, Claiming the Dream, 35-36; Yancey, When Hell Froze Over, 31-35.\(^{13}\)Yancey, When Hell Froze Over, 31-35; Edds, Claiming the Dream, 35-36; Baker, Hold Fast to Dreams, 72-73.
Benny Lambert as its chair. This broad appeal would characterize Wilder for years. Although this was a victory for a black candidate, Wilder was not helped that much by the Richmond Crusade for Voters, an organization that worked to mobilize black voters. The most work they did was to claim victory. Wilder had to cover all of the Crusade’s expenses. So, it was with this motley coalition of support that Doug Wilder headed to the Virginia Senate.  

Friends were not that easy to come by in the Senate. After all, these were mostly "good ole boys" and Wilder was black. In fact, Wilder was a black man who defeated their friend, Fred Pollard. He was able to make one friend, William Rawlings, a State Senator from Southampton County. As Wilder’s deskmate, Rawlings made sure that Wilder was at all the right meetings where key decisions were made. Rawlings also helped Wilder and the Senate’s conservative hierarchy avert a collision over committee assignments. Many of the "good ole boys" wanted to get Wilder’s seat on the Corporations, Insurance and Banking Committee. Rawlings convinced Wilder to take a seat on the Privileges and Elections because he would be able to ensure himself a Senate seat, and could rise to chair this powerful committee. He assured the hierarchy that Wilder would only be junior member of the committee. In addition, Rawlings made sure that Wilder cast the right votes. Owing to their different constituencies, that sometimes meant that they cast different votes.  

14 Baker, Hold Fast to Dreams, 72-83; Edds, Claiming the Dream, 35-36.  
15 Edds, Claiming the Dream, 36-37; Baker, Hold Fast to Dreams, 80-83; Yancey, When Hell Froze Over, 35-38.
One night Wilder and his wife attended an event at the John Marshall. The event, sponsored by the Virginia Food Dealers Association, ended with the singing of the state song, "Carry Me Back to Old Virginny." Wilder left in silent protest. The next day, he took to the floor of the Senate to denounce the song and call for its repeal. This caused people to see Wilder as a firebrand liberal. He got letters of protest from around the world. In addition, he was criticized by political ally Bob Butcher. According to Butcher, this was Wilder's first act, and should have been something different. This incident did produce some humor. Mark Russell was in town for an event. He played a parody of the state song that discussed Wilder's fight. Russell had thought that folks would stand when they heard the music. The only one who stood was Wilder who knew in advance of Russell's plans.\(^\text{16}\)

In addition to the state song, Wilder took on several other issues in the 1970s. One was his fight against enacting tax exemptions for discriminatory country clubs. Wilder was successful in seeing that the

\(^\text{16}\)Baker, Hold Fast to Dreams, 84-86; Yancey, When Hell Froze Over, 35-38; Douglas Durden, "Political Satirist Tunes in Virginia, Wilder's Show," Richmond Times-Dispatch, 23 January 1986, C1(M); There are several editions of the major state daily papers. I have indicated the edition with an initial appearing after the page number(s) of the article cited. For the Richmond Times-Dispatch, the city, or final, edition is denoted by a "C." The earlier editions are cited as either the "1 Star" or "2 Star" edition, just as they are on the microfilm. The Richmond News Leader published two editions. The early edition was the Capitol edition, denoted by a "C." The later, or final edition was the metro edition, denoted by an "M." The Washington Post published many editions. In this thesis, I have used the city edition, indicated by "DC." The other edition is the Virginia blue, denoted by "Va Blue" in the citation. The Roanoke Times and World News had two editions that I used. One is the final edition, indicated by an "M." The other was the New River Valley edition, denoted by "NVR." The New York Times also published many editions. The one is used is the local, or New York City, edition, denoted by an "L." The other newspaper articles cited appeared in single edition publications.
exemptions were defeated. Another issue was the south’s first fair housing law. He and fellow Senator Bill Fears helped guide the bill through the General Assembly. The bill was signed into law by Linwood Holton. A third issue was the Martin Luther King holiday bill that Wilder first introduced in 1975. It finally passed in 1984 as an addition to Lee-Jackson Day.\(^\text{17}\)

By the late 1970s, Wilder was moving up through the ranks. By 1976, he was chairing the Senate Committee on Rehabilitation and Social Services. He also chaired the Senate Transportation Committee before chairing the Privileges and Elections Committee in 1984. He was a power in the black community. As early as 1970, when he differed with the Crusade for Voters over City Council elections in Richmond, Wilder was establishing his power in the black community. By the late 1970s, he was the most politically powerful black in Virginia. By the early 1980s, Wilder was ready to move on to something bigger. He just needed a spark to light that fire.\(^\text{18}\)

During the rise of Chuck Robb, in the early 1980s, Wilder was Robb’s key power broker in relation to black concessions in the new administration. This was because Wilder had helped convince black voters that Robb would be kind to black concerns. Furthermore, Wilder had helped Robb raise money to cover his campaign debts in 1977. Also, Wilder had sided with the Robbites in 1980, when the state party went

\(^{17}\)Yancey, When Hell Froze Over, 35-38; Baker, Hold Fast to Dreams, 89; Edds, Claiming the Dream, 37-39.
\(^{18}\)Yancey, When Hell Froze Over, 38-40; Baker, Hold Fast to Dreams, 90-95; Edds, Claiming the Dream, 37-39.
through a nasty liberal-conservative fight. Within the Robb administration, anything black had to be signed off on by Wilder. His rise in the Senate had caused him to be a broker. Now, he was reaping the benefits of those years. ¹⁹

For all the niceness between Robb and Wilder up to 1981, there was one fault line. Robb had supported Senator Harry Byrd, Jr.'s 1979 submission of a list of ten white men for federal judgeships. The state's black community supported James Sheffield, a black jurist who later withdrew his candidacy after tax problems surfaced. Robb only came on board when he suggested Henry Marsh for a judgeship. Marsh declined. Wilder did point out that Robb could have done more. For this reason, Wilder and some of his cohorts ducked Robb's campaign kickoff. Wilder did come on board at the time of Robb's nomination, but a tiny fault line already existed. ²⁰

During the Robb administration, Wilder came under fire for the 1982 General Assembly session. The main volleys were from radical black activists like Sa'ad El-Amin who said Wilder should have done more to get the King holiday bill passed. That bill had failed during the session. The pressure was on Wilder in the black community. What happened next may or may not have been the result of that pressure. ²¹

The next step put Wilder on the statewide stage. Wilder was unhappy with the party hierarchy's nominee for the U.S. Senate in 1982, ²²

¹⁹Yancey, When Hell Froze Over, 40; Baker, Hold Fast to Dreams, 117-118.
²⁰Baker, Hold Fast to Dreams, 118-119.
²¹Yancey, When Hell Froze Over, 40.
Owen Pickett. Wilder had been at the secret meetings where Pickett’s name was tossed about, and had never voiced any concerns. His concerns came after Pickett wrapped himself in the good name of Harry Byrd. Wilder threatened to run as an independent if Pickett were the party’s nominee. This brought about a standoff that lasted for several months. Pickett backed down and Wilder was seen as a rising power in Virginia politics.\textsuperscript{22}

One incident during the Pickett episode showed how far Virginia had to go. Al Smith, a conservative Democrat and Robb’s cronie who was never comfortable with integration, wanted to meet with Wilder and see what could be worked out. When they left out from the Capitol, Wilder was driving. He suggested that they eat at the all-white Commonwealth Club. Smith declined, saying that “I’m not going to spend the rest of my life apologizing to my friends for carrying you in there.” The next few days were an uproar. Smith felt he was set up. Wilder said the incident proved that Virginia had not changed. Sa’ad El-Amin still took the opportunity to criticize Wilder for working on nonimportant issues.\textsuperscript{23}

With the resulting prestige from the Pickett affair, Wilder looked to expand to the state level. One of his first actions was to take aim at Mary Sue Terry, who was being touted as the next Attorney General. As was often the case with Wilder, he could not accept someone stealing the spotlight. So, even though he had no intentions of running for Attorney

\textsuperscript{22}Baker, Hold Fast to Dreams, 126-137; Yancey, When Hell Froze Over, 40-42. \textsuperscript{23}Baker, Hold Fast to Dreams, 138-142.
General, Wilder made life hard for Mary Sue Terry’s drunk driving initiatives in the Robb Administration. All this was done for no more than personal spite. In addition, there was the speculation about which office Wilder would seek. In one scenario, he was going to run against Senator John Warner in 1984.24

By late 1983, Wilder was thinking about the Lieutenant Governorship. He knew that time was ticking away. Delegate Dick Bagley was looking at running for Governor, but was seen as possibly wanting to step down and run for Lieutenant Governor. Mary Sue was being asked to step up. Neither happened, but Wilder knew he had to act. He began discussing things with friends and supporters. But, he did not immediately bring in a bunch of consultants. Wilder was too frugal for that. What he did do was to get together a group of ten people who would serve as a braintrust. By summer, 1984, Wilder was ready to roll.25

On July 3, 1984, Wilder formally entered the race for Lieutenant Governor. This was done in Richmond in the Old Senate Chamber. This place was also symbolic for it contained a portrait of Harry Byrd, Sr. that peered down on the room’s lectern. Wilder did not bring up race. He walked and talked like an Old Virginian. The room was picked for its symbolism. The day was picked because it was a slow news day.26

During late 1984, Wilder got his circle together in Fredericksburg. These folks peppered Wilder with questions about the

24Ibid., 151-152.
25Ibid., 155-159.
26Baker, Hold Fast to Dreams, 159; Yancey, When Hell Froze Over, 435.
race and him. But, most offered support. Robb’s people were not at this meeting. At the same time, it was decided by Wilder to bring on Paul Goldman to manage his campaign. Goldman was not expensive, and he was an outstanding strategist.\textsuperscript{27}

Not everyone was supportive of Wilder. The party regulars scrambled to try and find an alternative. Robb’s press secretary pointed out that blacks could not win in Virginia. This fanned more flames between Wilder and Robb. Many people were wanting Dick Bagley to run against Wilder. These people feared that Wilder would cause the entire ticket to lose in the general election, especially in the wake of the Democrats’ lackluster showing in the 1984 elections, where Presidential candidate Walter Mondale and United States Senate candidate Edythe Harrison had been trounced by their Republican opponents.\textsuperscript{28}

But, Wilder won the nomination and the election. The election hinged on several factors. First, Wilder went on a tour of the state. He began in the coalfields. This tour generated excellent press, and was low on overhead expenses. While on the tour, he picked up the endorsement of House Speaker A. L. Philpott, an old conservative from the Southside. This endorsement opened the floodgates for Main Street Democrats to support Wilder with their votes and their money. Finally, Wilder, notoriously cheap, ran an inexpensive campaign. This allowed him to save up for an extensive ad campaign in the election’s closing weeks.

\textsuperscript{27}Baker, \textit{Hold Fast to Dreams}, 163-164.
\textsuperscript{28}Baker, \textit{Hold Fast to Dreams}, 173-174; Yancoy, \textit{When Hell Froze Over}, 100-115.
One ad, considered the best, featured Kenbridge Town Policeman Joe Alder telling why law enforcement was behind Wilder. The tour, Philpott’s endorsement and the ad campaign put Wilder over the top, 52 percent to 48 percent. In telling fellow unionist Scott Reynolds of the victory, Virginia AFL-CIO activist Danny LeBlanc simply said, "Brother, Virginia has just walked into the twentieth century." 29

29 Yanoey, When Hell Froze Over, 186-369 (LeBlanc quote on 363).
Chapter 2—Settling Into Office

Normally, winning a Lieutenant Governor’s race does not raise many eyebrows. Such was not the case in 1985 after Virginia elected Doug Wilder. History had been made and everyone knew it. Wilder himself put things into perspective as he looked across the crowd in a room in which he had worked in college when he waited tables at the John Marshall Hotel. He had once said, "Like Ralph Ellison’s character, I was invisible." He told his supporters on election night, "I used to listen to political speeches as I would wait tables on this floor. Little did I realize then I would one day be your Lieutenant Governor."  

Indeed, many in the press and public were looking for Wilder to put his win into perspective. How he did so would be of prime importance as it would be the first impression that many would have of him and the first impression that all Virginians would have of their new Lieutenant Governor. Wilder described his victory by saying that he won based simply on qualifications. That is, he was more qualified than his opponent, John Chichester, to be a heartbeat away from the Governorship of the Old Dominion. Publicly, Wilder claimed that race did not affect his campaign at all. In fact he said he was able to downplay race because "I’m not a threat to anyone." Indeed, Wilder moved beyond being simply a "black politician." He added that his honesty and perseverance should be something for other blacks to look to, and in his victory,

1"A Black Victory in the Old Dominion," Newsweek, 18 November 1985, 46 (invisible quote); Michael Hardy, "Upset Winner Wilder ‘Proud to Be Virginian,’" Richmond Times-Dispatch, 6 November 1985, A1, A9(C) (Wilder election night quote).
blacks could find ways to overcome adversity. Thus, Wilder was saying that blacks should look to themselves for improvement. In that same vein, Wilder said that he proved that anyone of any background could rise to greatness. Moreover, for Wilder, the election showed that Virginia could progress.²

For all of his work, Wilder drew some praise, as did the Commonwealth of Virginia. The Richmond Times-Dispatch praised Wilder for winning "the old-fashioned way." The paper's editors pointed out that he did this on his own. For Wilder, nothing could have been better. This editorial fit right in with the things he was saying publicly about his win being based on self-sufficiency.³

But, Wilder did not do it alone. There were some voters involved. And for them, the Washington Post had praise. They felt that Wilder's victory somehow atoned for the past sins of the state, and that such atonement moved Virginia forward. Specifically, the Post editors claimed that the 1985 elections "lifted a political curse dating back to the days of Massive Resistance." Wilder avoided this line of reasoning in


³"Election Postscript," Richmond Times-Dispatch, 8 November 1985, A14(C).
his own statements.4

By the numbers, Wilder's victory was quite impressive. Virginia's voters, in 1985, were 85 percent white. Moreover, 75 percent of Wilder's support was white. That is, three out of every four votes cast for Wilder was cast by a white hand in a state that once would not even allow blacks to vote. In terms of the entire electorate, Wilder got over 44 percent of the white vote. The only reason that the race was closer than expected was that some people had lied to pollsters and some pollsters had overestimated black turnout. That did make the race close. It was not until late on election night that Virginians could be assured of making history. Thus, folks were relieved when Wilder won, though his supporters were not surprised. Even that being the case, Wilder would still not blame racial attitudes for his vote totals being less than those of his tickmates.5

For all the theories and public relations, however, there were some concrete reasons that Doug Wilder won in 1985. One factor was the immense popularity of outgoing Governor Chuck Robb which helped all Virginia Democrats and caused some to label Robb "an architect of November's Democratic Sweep." On the eve of the election, Robb's

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popularity was sky-high. One poll showed that almost 70 percent of
Virginians rated the Governor as excellent or good, and only 2 percent
saw him poorly. The popularity of the Robb administration caused voters
to be content. Thus, the coattail effect was alive and well on November
5, 1985. In 1985, people were actually voting for someone. Those folks
were voting for the centrist message of a ticket that seemed to be
molded in the image of Chuck Robb. Even Paul Goldman, Wilder’s chief
consultant, pointed out that Robb helped to create a positive atmosphere
for Democrats. 6

For as much as Robb did, there was also much credit to be given to
Wilder’s campaign and the fact that Wilder was on a strong ticket. Doug
Wilder attributed his victory mostly to a well-financed ad blitz and a
tour of the state that originated in the mind of Paul Goldman. It was on
the tour that the campaign’s turning point, the Philpott breakfast,
occurred. Wilder was not keen on the tour at first and had to be
convinced of its usefulness. Wilder carried the traditional three
corners that Democrats need to win: the coalfields, tidewater and
northern Virginia. He did so by running a positive campaign that
appealed to Virginia’s future and that did not dwell on Virginia’s past.

6Virginia Commonwealth University, Commonwealth Poll, November 1985,
Institute for Research in Social Science, University of North Carolina,
Chapel Hill, Data Archival Study Number NNSP-NE-001; Michael Barone,
“Good-News Elections: People Are Voting for Leadership and Achievement,”
Washington Post, 7 November 1985, A24(DC); “Wilder’s Inauguration Marks
New Day in Virginia,” Richmond Afro-American and Richmond Planet, 25
January 1986, 1 (architect quote); “The Democratic Deluge,” Richmond
Times-Dispatch, 6 November 1985, A14(C); Dale Eisman, “Democrats Saw
Change, Doak Says,” Richmond Times-Dispatch, 10 November 1985, B1, B10(C).
The Republicans had been mired in Virginia's past.\footnote{7}

And, Wilder stayed on strategy. The ad blitz accounted for 80 percent of Wilder's campaign expenses, and allowed Wilder to get his message out better. Another reason Wilder won is that he was able to escape his liberal record in the Virginia Senate. Larry Sabato was right that a black liberal could not win in Virginia. The trouble with Sabato's analysis was that Wilder was not attacked by the Republicans for his liberal record. One way Wilder did this was to avoid black issues that would remind the public of his color. In other words, "Wilder...ran as a qualified candidate who happened to be black." His ad blitz featured Wilder as a tough on crime moderate. The highlight was an ad that featured Southside cop Joe Alder telling why law enforcement supports Doug Wilder. The ad actually made Alder a celebrity. A final point, according to Paul Goldman, was that Virginia had progressed to a point where most folks would judge people based on their merit. This, said Goldman, could be attributed to shows like "Benson" and "The Cosby Show" that helped to soothe race relations.\footnote{8}
The final public facet of the 1985 Wilder campaign was the statement the campaign made about Virginia politics. Black commentators such as Eddie Williams and Julian Bond pointed out that this election showed that black candidates could win. Bond added that the real factor was that Wilder could raise the money needed to run statewide. In Virginia, the Wilder victory confirmed the notion that the Old Dominion was no longer in the clutches of the Byrd Machine. The Richmond Afro-American pointed out that blacks were split as to whether the victory would improve race relations.9

The big implication for Wilder involved the focus on Robb and 1989. Many were trying to say that 1985 was proof that Robb’s conservative approach was needed for victory. To this end, many observers pushed for Mary Sue Terry to be the party’s standard bearer in the next gubernatorial election, and were touting Robb as a solution to the national party’s Presidential losing streak. This was not the case according to Paul Goldman, who suggested that the moderate-conservative mold was not the end-all to winning in Virginia or the nation. Goldman’s statements drew the ire of the Richmond News Leader, which wondered if Goldman was calling for a national liberal ticket in 1988. What the 1985 race also did was to begin to pit Wilder and Terry against one another for the 1989 gubernatorial nomination. The race was on and Wilder would

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9"Historic Day in Richmond," Richmond Afro-American and Richmond Planet, 9 November 1985, 1; Gloria Hawkins, "Bond Hopes Wilder's Win Will Open Doors," Richmond Times-Dispatch, 8 December 1985, B7(C); Michael Williams, "Byrd Era's Grip Broken," A8(C); "Satisfaction Follows Wilder's Win," Richmond Afro-American and Richmond Planet, 16 November 1985, 9.
have to be on his best to be the nominee.  

The race began when Wilder, early on, started to take swipes at Chuck Robb. The day after the election, all things looked calm. The press painted Robb and Wilder as friends, even pointing out that, as Governor, Robb had consulted with Wilder over the issue of patronage. Over the next couple of weeks, however, that changed. Wilder decided, even before he was inaugurated, to begin positioning himself for the 1989 Governor’s race. The first strike was a massive fired by Wilder’s chief consultant in the 1985 race, Paul Goldman. He claimed that Robb was trying to take too much credit for Wilder’s victory. He said he was speaking out because the media made it appear that Robb ran the entire campaign, and was trying to use the Virginia victories to bolster Robb’s ambitions for national office. Goldman pointed out that Robb was against the tour and the use of Wilder’s war record. He said that Robb did nothing to help with fundraising and only appeared for Wilder late in the campaign. Goldman added that real credit was deserved by "A. L. Philpott, 10 fellow State Senators of Wilder and Gov.-Elect Gerald Baliles, all of who gave support to Wilder at a time when it might have harmed them politically."  

Amazingly, the first word out of the Robb camp seemed to agree

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with Goldman. Robb's press secretary George Stoddart said that Robb agreed with the assessment that he may have been overcredited. Further, Stoddart said, "Senator Wilder deserves the credit." That tune changed. The next day, Robb said that he was not going after excessive credit.

Robb did take Baliles and Terry to show them off at Democratic National Committee events and Democratic Leadership Council events. Wilder declined to go. Goldman told the press that Wilder was on vacation. Donald Baker pointed out that this represented Wilder positioning himself vis-à-vis Robb and Mary Sue Terry for 1989.\(^\text{12}\)

As for his plans for the next few years, Wilder was quite mum. He vaguely said that he would be active in public policy areas, especially education and transportation. He did add that he would have to be "more frugal and more spartan" since the job change would cause him to take a pay cut.\(^\text{13}\)

The job also meant another thing. Wilder would no longer be a State Senator. Before resigning from the Senate, Wilder waited until the election was certified by the Commonwealth. In the final tally, Wilder got 685,329 votes, or 51.8 percent, while Chichester got 636,695 votes, or 48.2 percent. Wilder resigned from the Senate on November 25, 1995. Governor Robb called for a special election to fill the seat. That

\(^\text{12}\)Dale Eisman, "Wilder Feels Others' Aid Outdid Robb's," A1, A3(C); "Credit Others, Wilder Aide Says," 16(M) (Stoddart quote); Peter Hardin, "Robb Takes Tales of Win to D.C.," Richmond News Leader, 19 November 1985, 22(M); Donald P. Baker, "Wilder Skips Trip with Robb," Washington Post, 21 November 1985, VA1(Va Blue).

election was set for December 17, 1985.¹⁵

The political players moved in to take over the Wilder seat. Right after the election, Delegate Benny Lambert announced that he would get in the race. He said that he was doing so with the support of Doug Wilder, Chuck Robb and Ed Willey. His main opponent was Chuck Richardson, a Richmond City Councilman. There were two minor candidates: William Golding, a political gadfly, and Audrey Jacobs, a Richmond attorney and part-time Republican. From the start, the establishment was behind Lambert. The Richmond Democrats tailor-made the nomination fight for Lambert. First, they made the deadline for filing for the nomination one day after the special election was declared. Then, city registrar Alice Lynch played her part by raising questions about Richardson’s candidacy, thus keeping him from filing by the deadline. Richardson had to run as an independent. Wilder and Mary Sue Terry also played the part of "good Democrat" by jumping on the stop-Chuck bandwagon and endorsing Lambert. Wilder told voters to support Lambert in a big way so that challengers would be deterred from running for the seat in 1987. This, of course, was meant to stop Chuck Richardson, who was not part of the clique. Of course, Lambert prevailed in the end. Wilder stayed out of the race to fill Lambert’s House seat, which was won by attorney Jean

Cunningham.\textsuperscript{15}

In addition to solidifying his hold in Richmond politics, Wilder had to get a staff together. His major aide was Joel Harris. Originally, Harris was a Republican. He had fought Richmond Mayor Henry Marsh in the 1970s as a coordinator of Teams for Progress. In addition, he had worked on Stan Parris's ill-fated 1985 gubernatorial campaign and was an organizer of Republicans for Baliles. Harris turned down a position with Baliles to work for Wilder. Harris would be Wilder's chief aide. In addition to Harris, Wilder named two administrative assistants, Judith Anderson and Sandra Williams.\textsuperscript{16}

Without a doubt, it was important for Wilder to get a staff in place because work was piling up. After his win, Wilder received enormous amounts of mail. His average haul was 100 pieces per day. Wilder got all kinds of political and financial requests as well as letters from children who simply wanted an autograph. The mail explosion was so great that Wilder's office had to ask for additional money. In all, Wilder requested and obtained over $150,000 in additional state

\textsuperscript{15}Jerry Turner, "Qualifications Called Key to Wilder's Win," Richmond Afro-American and Richmond Planet, 16 November 1985, 1, 5; "Election for Senate Seat is Tuesday, Dec. 17," Richmond Afro-American and Richmond Planet, 14 December 1985, 1, 5; Tom Campbell and Dale Eisman, "Wilder, Ms. Terry Join Fight to Boost Lambert's Bid," Richmond Times-Dispatch, 11 December 1985, B1, B4(C); "Candidates Already Lining Up for Lambert's Seat," Richmond Afro-American and Richmond Planet, 23 November 1985, 1, 5.

A well-known rule in politics is that one also has unofficial advisors. Doug Wilder was no different. One unofficial advisor was Paul Goldman, the chief strategist for Wilder’s campaign. The other was Jay Shropshire, a Senate clerk, who came to town with A. L. Philpott. The three were not prone to getting along, though Goldman and Harris did sometimes. But, Wilder liked it that way because such a situation allowed him to maintain full control.  

Wilder also had to use his position to institutionalize his victory. One way he did that was to establish the Underdog Fund. This PAC was formed in early December, 1985. The original intent of the fund was to provide expertise to candidates across the country in state elections that were seen as being underdogs. The fund would only provide consulting, not money. The candidates would be of all races, not just black candidates. Robb had tried something similar, but had long since abandoned the idea. The Underdog Fund’s initial assets were to come from a $75,000 surplus left over from the Wilder campaign. Wilder would also

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raise money for the fund through special events. ¹⁹

One such event took place prior to Wilder’s inauguration. Held at Old City Hall in Richmond, the event was a $250/person gathering to commemorate Wilder’s becoming Lieutenant Governor. This event was coupled with a “Midnight Breakfast” on the same evening that cost $25/person. The dinners raised around $75,000 for the fund. He was able to get some heavy hitters to cough up big money, such as a $5000 contribution from Coors. Smaller contributions included one from a staff member at Virginia State University, Pansy Jackson, who was in the process of writing a book on Wilder’s life. Jackson sent Wilder $50 in pennies. ²⁰

As 1986 unfolded, so did the true meaning of the Underdog Fund. In one sense, the fund served as a slush fund to pay Paul Goldman. An example of this was a $2000 check that was cut to Goldman on April 14, 1986. By August, Wilder had doled out over $4000 to Goldman, and the fund still had no candidates. Wilder had paid for consulting, but there was no one to give consultation to. By August, the fund had about


$45,000. Wilder had raised $117,000, and had spent $72,000 on things such as catering and the consulting expenses of Goldman, Chuck Nicholson and Joel Harris. Goldman assured the press that Wilder was only waiting for electoral fields to be set across the country, and that the Underdog Fund would be providing only expertise.\(^{21}\)

What a difference two months can make, for it was in October that Wilder radically altered the expressed intent of the Underdog Fund. He announced, in early October, that the fund would now concentrate on candidates for the 1987 Virginia General Assembly session. Now the fund was becoming what many thought it was intended to be, a political arm to further Doug Wilder's gubernatorial ambitions in 1989. At this point, Wilder also appointed a group of persons to oversee the fund. Those persons included Richmond lawyer Jackie Epps, State Party chair Larry Framme, Democratic politico Bob Crouch, and political scientist Calvin Miller. Only time would tell how things would sort out before the 1987 elections.\(^{22}\)

As mentioned, most of the money for the Underdog Fund came from the activities surrounding Wilder's inauguration. The inauguration


itself took place on January 11, 1986 in Richmond. Wilder said witty things like, "Virginia has changed more than some Virginians think," or, "Leaders are always behind the people. History is being thrust upon us." There were more than 10,000 onlookers when Wilder was sworn in by State Supreme Court Justice A. Christian Compton. The inaugural parade came first, however, and its theme was recognition of the handicapped. Though Wilder did not have a platform speech during the actual ceremony, he was in the heart and mind of incoming Governor Gerald Baliles, who said Wilder's election moved the Commonwealth towards "further liberty."23

But, all was not well during inauguration weekend. On the very day of Wilder's inauguration, it was learned that he would be served a summons for "violating the state building code" in relation to a house he owned in the Church Hill section of the city. People said that the house was kept in shoddy condition, and a magnet for bums and rodents. The house was an issue that had surfaced in the 1985 race. People had complained about the house, but a grand jury had dropped action after Wilder assured the court that the house was in the process of being repaired. Wilder would have to appear in court on January 28, 1986. The complaint claimed that Wilder had halted repairs after the grand jury

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23 Charles Cox, "History Was On a Lot of Virginians' Minds," Richmond Times-Dispatch, 12 January 1986, A1, A12(C) (Wilder quotes); "Baliles, Wilder, Ms. Terry to Be Sworn in at Midday," Richmond Times-Dispatch, 11 January 1986, A1(C); Dale Eisman, "Baliles, Wilder, Ms. Terry Sworn in, Say State 'Leading the Nation Again': Three Look Forward in Hope, Baliles Says," Richmond Times-Dispatch, A1, A13(C) (Baliles quote).
backed off its complaints.²⁴

This latest complaint came from Donald Reid, who first complained in mid-November, 1985. The second time Reid complained was on December 16, 1985. The summons stemmed from this action. Immediately, the Richmond Building Inspection Office said that the complaints were not politically motivated. But, some of Wilder's supporters wondered aloud why the summons was issued at the particular time it was. Wilder replied that he had sold the house after the November election. On January 11 and 12, most papers reported that neither Wilder nor Joel Harris would reveal the buyer. On the 12th, the Washington Post listed the buyer as H. Louis Salamonsky. Other papers reported the sale when the deed was checked on January 13, 1986.²⁵

In actuality, the house had been sold on November 29, 1985 to HLS Associates, a real estate trust owned by Salamonsky, who had donated $7000 to Wilder's 1985 campaign. Wilder sold the house for $34,000.

There were no legal problems with the lapse between sale and deed recordation, because there is no legal time limit for deed recordation in Virginia. Salamonsky had been taking the steps to get a building permit so he could improve the home. Because the house was no longer

Wilder's, the summons was dropped.\textsuperscript{26}

Dropping the summons did not drop the public brouhaha, however. Roy West, Richmond's mayor, wanted a full scale investigation into the political nature of the charges against Wilder. The Richmond Building Inspector's office continued to maintain that there was no political motivation in the Wilder inquest. But, West pointed out that there were worse houses in the city that they were not going after. The actual inspector, Juanita Coles, publicly defended her actions. West did grant that if he were wrong, he would let the matter drop. But, West maintained that there were still worse houses in the city. He wanted to know how the city came to act and why they did not ascertain if Wilder owned the house. Then, West restated that he believed the city's actions to be politically motivated. Because the charges were dropped, however, the matter became dormant for a while.\textsuperscript{27}

There was one more flare-up over the house. In April, Wallace and Celestine Mills sued Wilder. They lived next door to the house and claimed that Wilder's workers had damaged their roof when they were working on the Wilder house. They were suing for $10,000 in damages after Wilder refused to fix their roof. The couple also claimed that

\textsuperscript{26}Liz Atwood, "House Deed Filed Late With Clerk," 15(M); Ray McAllister and Mike Grim, "Wilder House Sold to Trust," Richmond Times-Dispatch, 14 January 1986, B1, B3(C).

Wilder accepted responsibility and offered to pay for the roof. Wilder replied that the plaintiffs were being untruthful and that he was not responsible for the damages. The suit dragged on for several months and was dropped in December, 1986. No one would disclose why it was dropped.\textsuperscript{28}

The rowhouse matter was crucial to Wilder's development in 1986. It demonstrated to the political establishment that Wilder could weather tough political storms. Even though the matter was not of Wilder's creation, it allowed him to show how strong he was.

Such was also the case with the early snipes at Chuck Robb. The early in-fighting with Robb allowed Wilder to establish himself as a major political player in Virginia. Wilder's early resilience would allow him to build his independent power base as he prepared for the apocalyptic showdown with Robb that occurred in late 1986.

But, Wilder's first year was not spent sniping at fellow Democrats. He did get some positive press for many of his speeches. Those occasions allowed Wilder to build a positive image among the voters. They also allowed Wilder some breathing space as he geared up to renew his attacks on the Democratic establishment, and faced more political turbulence.

Chapter 3—Gearing Up for the Big Fight

There was positive attention on Wilder, to be sure. Just after the election, People magazine did a full-feature article on Virginia's newest political star. In addition, Wilder did an advertisement for the United Negro College Fund and spoke with several national outfits including "Voice of America" and the "Portfolio of State Issues." Many times, Wilder was lumped with William Lucas, a black Republican who unsuccessfully sought the Michigan Governorship in 1986. The national attention was at a high point when Muhammad Ali visited Wilder in March. The Ali visit went well with Wilder joking about becoming a boxer and Ali joking about running for Governor.¹

Wilder was also making international headlines during his first year in office. In mid-January, the United States Information Agency set up an interview to be broadcast in Europe, Australia, Asia and Africa. Wilder did additional interviews for Swedish and South African television on the occasion of Martin Luther King's Birthday. He used those interviews to hint that he would seek higher office and to express his outrage at apartheid in South Africa. In July, 1986, Wilder accompanied Ted Turner to the Goodwill Games in Moscow. Wilder's purpose for going was, "Good will, good will, good will. And some trade if we can get it." He did not get any official business done in the Soviet

Union, but he did become convinced of the need for open dialogue between the United States and its Cold War adversary.²

Wilder was able to position himself well by going to Taiwan on behalf of the Commonwealth. Taiwan was more than just some little country. Granted, there were no Taiwanese companies in Virginia at the time, but the Taiwanese were big importers of Virginia tobacco ($12.3 million annually) and Virginia coal ($6.6 million annually). The trip lasted six days in late March, 1986. While in Taiwan, Wilder met with several Taiwanese officials and attended the "USA Products Exposition." He also participated in an investment seminar. The goal of the entire trip was to open up more markets for Virginians, and Wilder was a salesman for the Commonwealth. After the trip, Wilder drew some praise from Baliles, who wrote to Wilder that the trip was "very helpful in our efforts to improve economic and cultural ties between Virginia and Taiwan."³

Wilder would represent the Commonwealth in one other place. In July, 1986, Wilder went to Japan. This affair was more low-key than the Taiwan trip. The visit was simply to be a "good will" voyage on behalf


of the Commonwealth. He spent the majority of his time with Japanese
government and business officials.\textsuperscript{4}

For all that Wilder did in the public limelight, there were also
his Constitutional duties. Namely, Wilder was required to preside over
the Virginia Senate. He first did so on January 13, 1986. He tried to
make things as normal as possible on the first day, though Jay
Shropshire did need to help walk him through some of his activities. He
added that he would stop the proceedings periodically to explain what
was going on to visitors in the Senate gallery. In fact, that became a
Wilder staple. He even gave Senate visitors postcards. In this way, they
would remember who Doug Wilder was.\textsuperscript{5}

Another way that visitors would remember Doug Wilder was for the
manner in which he ran the Senate. In short, Wilder was a strict
disciplinarian when it came to the decorum of the Senate members. In one
instance, Senator Hunter Andrews told the other Senators that the
practice of introducing guests in the Senate gallery was time-consuming
and that it was time to get to work. Wilder reprimanded Andrews and
reminded him and the other Senators that the onlookers "are the business
of the Commonwealth." Another instance of Wilder's strict discipline was

\textsuperscript{4}"Moscow Trip Included in Busy Wilder Itinerary," Richmond News
Leader, 3 July 1986, 10(M) (voyage quote); "Itinerary for the Hon. Mr.
Lawrence Douglas Wilder from the United States of America," "Wilder
Papers," Box 5.

Do More Than Just Preside," Washington Post, 14 January 1986, C1, C7(DC);
Bill Wasson, "Jubilant Wilder Says 'He'll Work With All,'" Richmond News
Leader, 14 January 1986, 6(M); "Wilder Welcomed Back to the Senate,"
Richmond Times-Dispatch, 14 January 1986, B3(C); Rex Springston, "Wilder
Gives Star Senate Performance," Richmond News Leader, 11 March 1986, 1,
4(M).
when he chastised Senator Wiley Mitchell for saying "Hell" during debate. But, for all the decorum and discipline, there were a few light-hearted moments. When Wilder first took over the Senate, Ed Willey, the powerful Senator from Richmond, reminded Wilder that his (Wilder's) mother had warned young Douglas against overinflating his ego. Willey joked that he would carry Wilder "to the woodhouse" if things did not go right.⁶

In addition to presiding over the Senate, Wilder was also required to vote in case of a tie. One instance of this came when the Senate was trying to pass legislation enabling motorists to be fined for not wearing a seat belt. The caveat was that the motorist had to be stopped for something else. When the vote first came up on March 7, 1986, the result was a tie. Wilder voted no, claiming the bill was too difficult to enforce. The bill would have passed, but two senators switched their votes at the last minute. The next day, Senator Charles Waddell tried to bring a different form of the bill to the floor. Again, there was a tie vote. Then, Senator Richard Holland tried to have the bill reconsidered. Wilder refused, even over the objections of Senator Bobby Scott.⁷ It was not the policy here that was important. It was that Wilder took a firm stand as a Lieutenant Governor, especially when that stand could be seen

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as unpopular among some Virginians. But, it did allow him to be seen as a supporter of individual rights.

Wilder also achieved headlines in early 1986 for the stands he took in speeches to mostly black audiences. One such speech was in February at the Lynchburg NAACP’s Freedom Fund Banquet. He decried the levels of public welfare and lack of responsibility in the black community. He said that blacks had to learn to depend on themselves just as former generations did. He also criticized absent fathers and "jive talk." He urged young black athletes to stay in school and said that black voter turnout was pitiful. One journalist, George Bowles, commented that Wilder’s outlook would be great for Virginians. The conservative *Richmond News Leader* also praised the speech on its editorial page. The paper pointed out that Wilder was "exerting an influence and inspiring others to want to do better than they thought they could."  

At the same time of the Lynchburg speech, Wilder was gearing up for an even bigger speech. This one would be in early March at Hampton University’s Black Family Conference. The conference drew on the resources of black scholars in relation to issues facing black families. The theme for the conference was "The Black Family: Building Coalitions for Change." He tried to cast the problems of drug abuse and out of

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wedlock births in the terms of how those problems cut across racial lines. He said that Americans of all colors had to come forward to stop these. He also called for more family values in the black community. He warned that "blind dependence on the government" would not suffice. Moreover, he said, "You've got to instill some degree of self-reliance in our people." 9

Wilder went back to Tidewater a month later to speak to another predominantly black audience. The setting this time was Norfolk State University. The event was a business conference. He called for continued preferential treatment for black businesses. But, he told the students that blacks themselves were responsible for making their businesses turn a profit. Thus, black businesses needed to be more self-reliant. Granted, he seemed to be on both sides of the issue, but no one in the press seemed to think so. Again, he got press for telling blacks not to rely on the government. 10

Wilder's speeches to black audiences were not limited to Virginia. In July, 1986, he addressed the NAACP's national convention in Baltimore. He admonished the group to become more active in the war on drugs. While he said that blacks were hit hardest by the drug problem, he added that drugs were a scourge to all races. He used the examples of


fallen athletes Len Bias and Don Rodgers to underscore his point. He added that young blacks should remember the self-reliance that got them the rights they had.  

These were not exactly the statements of a liberal, urban State Senator. They were the statements of a man positioning himself to run for higher office. And, the early numbers looked good. In a poll taken in March 1986, 50 percent of Virginians approved of the way Wilder was handling his job, while 21 percent were undecided.  

The conditions could not be better for Wilder to position himself. But, not to be mistaken, Wilder’s speeches were to more than just black audiences. In fact, Wilder was in great demand as a guest speaker. Offers came from around the country. He even got fees for going to some of the events. Most of his messages were about self help. He was on the road so much that he even had to bring another lawyer into his firm to handle the legal work. Simply stated, the lecture circuit made Doug Wilder a busy man.

One never knew where Wilder would be speaking next. One such speech was in Richmond in late February, 1986. Wilder told the Society of Professional Journalists that he liked the watchdog role of the press. He did say that the line between right and wrong in legislative

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ethics was, at times, "thin." He added, however, that ethical problems were easily noticeable. Another speech took Wilder to Massachusetts, where he spoke to the Black Law Students Association at Harvard University and attended a reception with Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis and Boston Mayor Raymond Flynn. Then, it was back to Virginia for a speech to the Tri-County Virginia Opportunities Industrialization Center. There, he told the kids to dream and chase those dreams.  

Some of Wilder's speeches were symbolic of Virginia's changes. One in particular was Wilder's speech at graduation ceremonies for the University of Virginia. He pointed out that he could not attend that school because of segregation. He looked positively at the changes Virginia had undergone in his lifetime. The real meat of his talk was about the need to care for the elderly, but the headlines dealt with the symbolism of Wilder speaking at the ceremony. He pointed out that blacks had opportunities like never before. Therefore, Wilder was still holding to his message of a positive outlook on race relations. This was a position that would not set off alarms in the minds of many Virginians.

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Wilder also used the speeches to put forth views on other issues. For example, he told the Virginia Network for Victims and Witnesses that people were so mad about the loopholes in the criminal justice system, that they were at a point of rebelling against the entire system. To remedy this, Wilder proposed cracking down on thugs who tried to intimidate witnesses, and consulting with victims before engaging in plea bargaining. His final measure was one that provided for reimbursement by criminals to victims. Taking another swipe at crime, Wilder praised William Bennett’s fight against drugs and urged the Virginia Sheriffs Association to be more involved in the fight. This drew the editorial praise of both the Richmond News Leader and the Richmond Times-Dispatch.\textsuperscript{16} Thus, Wilder was getting good marks on crime in the conservative press. This allowed him to be seen as tough on crime, thereby building his position for 1989.

In addition to crime, Wilder spoke on social issues too. He told teachers in Hanover County to teach as best they could. He added that, even in the worst years of Virginia education, "excellence" was always present. He also talked about how Gramm-Rudman would affect social services. The Gramm-Rudman bill required a balanced federal budget. It was thought that spending cuts would take precedence over tax increases. Wilder said that Gramm-Rudman cuts in federal spending would strain the

\textsuperscript{16} "Wilder Urges Tough Laws to Blunt 'Citizen Rebellion,'" Richmond News Leader, 7 May 1986, 5(M); Olivia Winslow, "Wilder Calls for Drug War, Urges NAACP to Join Fight," Richmond Times-Dispatch, 4 August 1986, B3(C); "Wilder’s War," Richmond News Leader, 4 August 1986, 10(M); "Doug Wilder Wants You," Richmond Times-Dispatch, 6 August 1986, A10(C).
resources of localities. To this end, he called on the Stafford NAACP to be more involved in local politics. He told the Daily Planet, a social services agency in Richmond, that they would feel the cuts too. For Wilder, more groups like the Planet were needed. Here, Wilder was protecting his base within the Democratic Party.

Not all of Wilder’s public actions were as non-controversial as the Taiwan trip. In April, he started down the road that led to conflict with the Democratic Party’s senior poohbah, Chuck Robb. Wilder came out of the gate smoking in early April. He said that Robb and the Democratic Leadership Council, an organization founded by moderate-conservative Democrats after the 1984 Presidential elections, were taking too much credit for his victory. In fact, Wilder said, “They had nothing to do with it.” Wilder said that the Democratic ticket was the winning variable and that the DLC’s philosophy would have excluded his candidacy. Moreover, Wilder argued that the DLC was trying to push certain groups out of the party, and that doing so would only hurt the party. Later, Wilder would bring up these same criticisms when he was completely embroiled in a feud with the Commonwealth’s former Governor. Robb countered that the DLC was inclusive and that he supported Wilder. Interestingly, Wilder had refused to join the DLC, while Baliles and Terry joined up. Wilder’s salvos drew unkind words from the Richmond

Times-Dispatch, which opined that Wilder, who ran as a moderate, was again showing liberal tendencies. They also pointed out that Robb's popularity had benefitted Wilder, and, therefore, Wilder was wrong to attack Robb and the DLC.¹⁸

Two weeks later, Wilder repeated the same criticism of the DLC, when he addressed the Arkansas Democratic Black Caucus. While he said the nation and the Democratic Party needed a change, he argued that the DLC was not the way to go. He said their fiscal policies could endanger important programs in housing, education and veterans' benefits. In addition to using the trip as a platform to attack the DLC, he also built his base. Just after the trip, Betsey Wright, Governor Bill Clinton's Chief of Staff, sent Wilder a list of the dignitaries he had met so that he could contact those folks.¹⁹

Wilder's salvos were not reserved for the DLC. In mid-July, 1986, Wilder spoke at the North Carolina Democratic Convention. He opened up on the National Rainbow Coalition and Jesse Jackson, in addition to criticizing Robb and the DLC. The National Rainbow Coalition was the left-leaning political machine organized by the Reverend Jesse Jackson. Wilder said that the two groups should quit sniping at one another and


focus on the 1986 Congressional elections. At this point, Wilder said the two groups were too focused on 1988. Such intraparty squabbles could only hurt the party in 1986. He singled out Jackson for opposing the re-nomination of Representative Peter Rodino (D-NJ) in favor of a black candidate, even though Rodino had been a supporter of the NRC’s agenda. As an extra stab at Jackson, Wilder sent a congratulatory letter to Rodino after he won his primary. Wilder’s solution was to bring the Robb and Jackson people together so that they could work out their differences and work together for victory in 1986. He said that anything else would only provide “aid and comfort to the Republicans we are trying to beat in 1986.”20 In other words, Wilder was accusing the DLC and NRC of treason against the Democratic Party.

It would seem that Wilder was closing his options in the party and public realms. But really, two things were going on here. The criticism of Robb allowed Wilder to be seen as being his own man. Moreover, it helped rally anti-Robb Democrats to his side. The criticism of Jackson was to help him build his own power base in the black community. Furthermore, that criticism allowed Wilder to appeal to working class whites who liked to see Jackson get beat up on.

Wilder also worked to build an image of him being independent from Governor Baliles. In April, 1985, the American Civil Liberties Union and

the Commonwealth had reached a settlement after the ACLU had sued Virginia in regards to policies at the Mecklenburg Correctional Center." The settlement called for convicted killers to be able to enjoy contact visits. This settlement caused Donald Huffman to leave the board in mid-1986. In July, 1986, Wilder came out against the practice. He said that killers had lost their rights when they committed crime. Attorney General Mary Sue Terry said the Commonwealth was bound by the federal court settlement.\(^2\)

Needless to say, Baliles and company were not happy about Wilder taking such an independent stand, especially since Baliles was Virginia’s Attorney General when the deal was made with the ACLU. Baliles argued that Wilder should have discussed his differences with the Governor in private as that was what Baliles thought to be the normal protocol for such things. Baliles said Wilder should have at least provided a warning. He added that Robb had even discussed his differences in private with then Governor John Dalton, a Republican. Joel Harris replied that no such warning or discussion was needed from Wilder. Towards the end of the month, Wilder said that he would continue to speak out on important issues. Trying to smooth things over, Baliles

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said he only wanted an advance warning of such statements by Wilder.\textsuperscript{22}

The immediate public reaction seemed to be in Wilder's favor. The \textit{Richmond News-Leader} praised Wilder's stand against such visits to convicts, pointing out that he was the only Democrat in Virginia to take such a strong stand. The \textit{Richmond Times-Dispatch} opined that Wilder was entitled to independent views, and that Baliles was wrong to suggest that Wilder clear his views with the Governor. They concluded, "Maybe Mr. Baliles and the ACLU are so flustered because Doug Wilder has recognized what they have not: That a majority of people are much more concerned about the forfeited rights of death-row inmates' victims than they are about special privileges for murderers and rapists."\textsuperscript{23}

In addition to the supportive editorials, Wilder was praised by others. Donald Huffan welcomed Wilder's criticism. He said it showed that he was not trying to be partisan when he criticized the deal in the first place. John Williams, Chairman of the Corrections Board, also praised Wilder's actions as "brave and sound."\textsuperscript{24} This issue served two purposes. First, it allowed Wilder to create an independent position from Baliles. Moreover, it allowed Wilder to get great press on an issue that many Virginians had strong views on.


At the same time Wilder was criticizing the Baliles visit plan, he was preparing to fulfill a campaign promise. That promise was to return to southwest Virginia and recreate the tour if he won. Well, he won, and it was time to pay up. The official announcement of the tour came in July, 1986. In announcing the tour, Joel Harris said, "It's something [Wilder] wants to do very much." The tour would kick off in the middle of August. In addition to fulfilling a promise, Wilder, according to Goldman, would be reaching out to hear the views of Virginians. One unspoken goal of the tour was to cultivate support for a gubernatorial run in 1989. Accompanying Wilder would be his son Larry and strategist Paul Goldman.25

The tour's first stop was in Collinsville on August 18, 1986. The purpose of this stop was to recreate the famous Philip breakfast. The recreation was held at the Dutch Inn, the same place the original breakfast was held. Philip praised Wilder's work as an ambassador for Virginia, saying, "We've gotten more mileage out of Doug Wilder than any other Lieutenant Governor." Wilder called the original breakfast the campaign's "turning point." He heaped praise on Philip, calling him "the man who brought us all together." The breakfast seemed to come off

as a joyous event for all, with praises running knee deep.\textsuperscript{26}

From Collinsville, the Wilder entourage moved on to southwest Virginia. The folks in those parts were glad that Wilder had remembered them. He assured the people that their voices would be heard in Richmond. There were a few mute rumbles, however, about Wilder’s distancing himself from Baliles. People in southwest Virginia, such as Edgar Bacon, were concerned about transportation. Wilder assured them he supported better roads for the coalfields, but he said he wanted to be sure that there would be "equity" for all parts of the state.\textsuperscript{27}

Early in his term, Baliles had come out for a massive road-building program that used sales tax increases to finance the improvements. Wilder was a member of the commission that finalized the plan. Now, here in southwest Virginia, Wilder was saying that the rural areas stood to lose if money for the program ran short. Baliles had projected about $10 billion in spending. Wilder said that this might not be enough because inflation was not considered in that figure. He pointed out that some areas could be shortchanged in the handing out of funds. Wilder said that about $3 billion more was needed to cover the costs of inflation. Wilder pledged to the Lee County residents that he would not allow them to be shortchanged. This sounded good to the

\textsuperscript{26}"Wilder Plans to Return to Southwest," B2(C); "Wilder Tour of Southwest Va. to Begin: Return Visit Was Campaign Promise," B5(DC); Tyler Whitley, "Wilder Savors Breakfast That Made History," 1(M); "Wilder Honors A. L. Philpott for Key Role in Campaign," Washington Post, B5(DC); "Wilder Recreates Campaign ‘Turning Point,’” Richmond Times-Dispatch, B8(C) (Philpott and Wilder quotes).

\textsuperscript{27}"Wilder Honors A. L. Philpott for Key Role in Campaign," B5(DC); Tyler Whitley, "Folks in Lee Love Attention from Wilder," Richmond News Leader, 20 August 1986, 15, 17(M) (Wilder quote).
southwest Virginians. After all, Wilder was speaking in a county that had 3 miles of four-lane roads.\textsuperscript{28}

Indeed, these attacks on inflation in the road program costs were not a blindside against Baliles. In early August, Wilder had met with Baliles about the program. He said he wanted to meet again to discuss some issues he raised about funding the program. After the speech in Lee County, Wilder wrote to Secretary of Finance Stuart Connock that he understood that inflation would not be figured in. He drew this from conversations between himself and Connock. Then, Wilder wrote to Connock saying that Secretary of Transportation Vivian Watts said inflation would be partially considered. Wilder suggested that some type of resolution was needed on this issue.\textsuperscript{29}

On the transportation issue, all was quiet on the Wilder front for about a month. During that time, the General Assembly met in special session and approved the Baliles plan, including a sales tax increase. At the end of September, however, Wilder came out against the sales tax increase. The day of the speech, Wilder’s office called the Governor at 10:30 to let him know that Wilder would be speaking. The speech came at noon, but Baliles did not get a copy of it until 4:30 in the afternoon. Wilder’s speech was to the Dulles Area Board of Trade. In the speech, he came out against the sales tax increase and an increase in the titling

\textsuperscript{28} Margaret Edds, Claiming the Dream, 48-50; "Wilder Asserts Inflation May Boost Road Plan Cost," Richmond Times-Dispatch, 20 August 1986, B10(C); Tyler Whitley, "Wilder Skeptical of Road Program," Richmond News Leader, 1, 4(M).

tax. He said that these measures were regressive. Wilder had tried to break a tie and kill the titling tax, but could not vote on a revenue bill. Wilder said he would have spoken out sooner, but he did not want to hurt the Governor's programs. Furthermore, he said he reserved the right to speak out because he was elected independently of Baliles. Wilder said it was now up to the state to provide sales tax relief to lower income Virginians. This could be done with the windfall from federal tax reforms, according to Wilder.\(^{30}\)

Reaction from the Governor was immediate. Baliles's press secretary, Chris Bridge, tried to play down the criticism and paint the picture that Baliles was unmoved. She said, "The Governor is not concerned about it. He is moving on to problems that need solving." But, privately, many were saying that Baliles was angered by the speech. Baliles did accuse Wilder of having a personal agenda. And, he wondered aloud why Wilder had never said anything before about the program. Perhaps he had forgotten the letter that Wilder had sent in early August when he raised questions about the program's funding.\(^{31}\)

Gerald Baliles was not the only person criticizing Wilder. House of Delegates Democrats Leslie Saunders and Richard Cranwell also


criticized Wilder. The two appeared before a group concerned with transportation issues. They attacked Wilder for his after-the-fact barbs hurled at the Governor. Cranwell said Wilder was engaged in "Monday-morning quarterbacking." Sanders chimed in, "You don’t wait until the ballgame is over to criticize the game plan." In a blatantly racist statement, Saunders compared Wilder to Virginia’s highways: "black top...with yellow stripes." Saunders said Wilder was a "coward."  

Wilder was not one to take such attacks. He was creating an independent position, and he defended it. He said that the "high tax lobby" would not deter him in his fight for tax fairness for all Virginians. And, he considered sales taxes a heavy burden for poor Virginians. In staking out his position, he invoked the names of past Virginia governors, Albertis Harrison, Mills Godwin and Linwood Holton. And, again, Wilder put in a plug for using 1987 windfalls to offset the sales tax increases on poor Virginians.  

There was some praise for Wilder’s actions. The Richmond Times-Dispatch said that Wilder’s points were valid. They only wished that he had raised them earlier. They said that sales taxes were for education. To fund roads, they called for tolls and pledge bonds. They also defended Wilder and said that Leslie Saunders was out of line to call Wilder a "coward." Paul Matthews of the NAACP also praised Wilder for

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33 Tyler Whitley, "Wilder Defends Stand on Sales Tax Increase," Richmond News Leader, 8 October 1986, 13(M); Claude Burrows, "Wilder to Stick to Tax Attitude," Richmond Times-Dispatch, 8 October 1986, B3(C).
fighting the sales tax increase. Matthews added that the sales tax increase and a seeming lack of black appointments made Baliles vulnerable among black voters. 34 If Baliles was getting weaker, then Wilder was cementing his base among blacks for the 1989 nomination contest and election.

34 "Wilder's Campaign," Richmond Times-Dispatch, 10 October 1986, A10(C) (Times-Dispatch quote); Tyler Whitley, "Wilder Speech Fears Concern NAACP Leader," Richmond News Leader, 30 October 1986, 15, 19(M).
Chapter 4—The Big Fight

As the tax issue began to fade, another issue was evolving in relation to Wilder. Specifically, people were beginning to become uneasy with Wilder’s continued differences with Baliles and Robb. One such person was Edgar Bacon, a party stalwart and power broker from southwest Virginia. Bacon wrote a letter to the Richmond News Leader in which he lashed out at Wilder for criticizing Baliles and Robb. He said Wilder was forgetting those who had helped him. Bacon told Wilder that many in the party shared his views. Indeed, many Virginians did recognize that Wilder was trying to create his own position to run for Governor in 1989. In fact, columnist George Wilbur called Wilder’s independence "a carefully planned program designed to enhance his political prospects in the years ahead." Wilder’s response was that he opposed the tax increases, not the transportation improvements specifically. He added, "I’m not posturing, I’m doing what I said I would do: be an honest voice for the people of Virginia."1

In the fall and winter of 1986, Wilder was doing more than just fighting with the Baliles-Robb wing of the party. In September, Lt. Governor Winston Bryant of Arkansas called for the formation of a drug council within the National Council for Lieutenant Governors. Wilder was

to head the council. The press release that Bryant used was actually written by Wilder’s people. So, there was more than just pure altruism going on. Wilder wanted to be sure he put the right spin on things.²

Wilder also refused vote in order to break a tie in the State Senate. In late September, there was a 20-20 tie on a provision for a lottery referendum. Wilder declined to vote, thereby letting the matter die. Later, when speaking before the Richmond Bar Association, Wilder said that he personally favored the lottery referendum. His attitude was "those who believe that government always knows best are wrong." He said that he did not vote because he could not vote on revenue bills. He assured the audience that there were no repercussions from his actions.³ Such positioning allowed Wilder to avoid having to take a definite stand on the lottery issue. Moreover, he could be seen as a populist for championing a referendum on the lottery issue.

There was another area of growing concern for Wilder. In late October, Wilder came under fire for accepting fees for speeches given in the Commonwealth. The report was first raised in a Virginia Business article about Wilder. No one really came out in Wilder’s defense. It was pointed out that Baliles and Terry did not accept such fees, though they both refrained from criticizing Wilder. Steve Haner and perennial GOP candidate Marshall Coleman chastised Wilder. Wilder was also criticized

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²Winston Bryant to L. Douglas Wilder, 3 September 1986, “Wilder Papers,” Box 3; Joel Harris to Mike Ross, 28 August 1986, Box 3.
by W. Paul Matthews of the Virginia NAACP. While this was going on, it was reported that Wilder had asked the Baptist General Convention of Virginia for $1500. That money request prevented Wilder from addressing that group.  

Several days after the fee incident flared up, more fuel was added to the fire when it was learned that Wilder had also accepted speaking fees as a member of the State Senate. The fees were mostly from college groups at places like Norfolk State University, St. Paul's College, and the University of Virginia. Larry Sabato, a University of Virginia political analyst, said, "It's the first time I can remember someone making a profit out of running for Governor." At this point, Wilder was still not saying anything to the press. Perhaps that was because Wilder had nothing to say. The only rationale one can surmise for the practice of charging fees is pure greed.

The fee request to the Baptist General Convention was not unique. For instance, in late 1985, Wilder responded to a speaking request by wanting to know "the usual fee that is provided." Like the Baptists, the United Negro College Fund had to retract its invitation to Wilder for a speech in Roanoke after the organization realized that it could not meet

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"Tyler Whitley, "Wilder Got Honorariums as Va. Senator," Richmond News Leader, 1 November 1986, 15, 21(M) (Sabato quote); "Wilder Drew Fees as Senator," Richmond Times-Dispatch, 2 November 1986, B2(C); My anonymous sources were particularly helpful in explaining Wilder's motives surrounding his acceptance of speaking fees.
his demands for a fee and expenses. One group that did pay Wilder was an alumni group from Norfolk State University. For appearing at a "roast" in his honor, Wilder walked away with $1500.  

Two events in particular really show how the fee process worked with Wilder. One was the failed attempt to get Wilder to speak in Covington at a meeting of the Virginia Fireman’s Association. The group extended the invitation in December, 1985. In mid-February, Wilder accepted the invitation and directed the group to deal with Judith Anderson. Everything seemed to be going well. As of April 2, Wilder still planned to go to the August event. Then, in late May, the group declined to let Wilder come because he wanted $2000 to cover the costs of using a state helicopter to go to Covington. Gerald Burks, one of the events organizers, wrote Anderson that "we did not expect to bear the total traveling expenses when we extended the invitation." 

Another example was Wilder’s dealings with BISCO, an organization in eastern Virginia. BISCO was an economic development partnership that specialized in cultivating the growth of small businesses. They wanted Wilder to speak at an event in May, 1986. BISCO had to agree to pay Wilder $1500 plus expenses before he would come. Only after BISCO agreed

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to the fee, would Wilder say for sure if he was coming.\(^8\)

Wilder also worked to mend some old fences in the fall of 1986. One event concerned itself with the most battered fence from Wilder’s past, the 1982 Pickett incident. In 1986, Pickett was running for Congress in the second district. In this district, Wilder would be able to have some influence as he held sway with many of the black activists who made up the party machinery in Norfolk. Rather than sitting on the sidelines, Wilder went to Norfolk in early October and endorsed Pickett. The event was in Norfolk and was attended by many of those activists that Pickett would need at the grassroots level. He added that the affair with Pickett in 1982 was never personal and that he liked Pickett’s commitment to fiscal conservatism. Neither did Wilder express remorse for his actions in 1982. His explanation was, "Owen has changed. I have changed. People have changed."\(^9\)

The political community acted like this was a spur of the moment thing, but Wilder had let it be known much earlier that he intended to support Pickett. As early as his inauguration, Wilder made his intentions clear. He said, "I’ll campaign for him. I told him that." Again, Wilder announced at the party’s Jefferson-Jackson Day Dinner that he was supporting Pickett. This came after Pickett had endorsed Wilder’s

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1985 bid. Prior to this, Wilder had also met with Pickett and Levi Willis, the premier black power broker in Norfolk.  

During this time, there was also the issue of taxation in Virginia. The federal government reforms of 1986 were set to take effect, and Virginians were grappling with the question of what to do with the extra money the state would get from federal reforms. Those federal reforms had eliminated many of the tax loopholes in the federal tax code. Thus, the gross taxable income level was raised, and would result in higher tax payments on the state level. Wilder could not afford to stay away from an issue like this. He chose a Southside venue, Surry County, to unveil some of his thoughts on the matter. He spoke at the dedication of a new government center there in October, 1986.  

The speech, at first, went like any other. He praised the county for its efforts to build its new government center, especially considering the fact that Surry was a county with limited resources. He looked very favorably on the county’s decision to use pay-as-you-go financing to erect the center. Best of all for Wilder, Surry was doing this without a tax increase. As Wilder continued to speak, he began to liken Surry’s efforts to those of Reagan. He said Virginia, in dealing with the tax windfall, needed the same type of fortitude that the

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citizens of Surry County had.\textsuperscript{12}

Specifically, Wilder said that Virginians should not pay higher aggregate state taxes as a result of federal reforms. In order to cut the overall tax bill, Wilder called for a cut in "the tax on non-prescription drugs." He added that the state needed to tighten the current system of complex regulations and loopholes, much as had been done at the federal level. For Wilder, this meant tax breaks for lower and middle income Virginians. This was in contrast to a GOP plan to simply return the windfall to taxpayers. Wilder’s plan was to eliminate tax breaks for wealthy Virginians. He argued that simply returning the money would keep an unfair system in place.\textsuperscript{13}

As the days rolled on, Wilder spoke more about his plans for taxes in Virginia. A day after the Surry speech, he was in Charlottesville, speaking to Family Services, Inc. He repeated his call for cutting taxes on over the counter drugs and tax credits for lower and middle income persons. A week later, he took things a step further. He announced his support for a plan to cut taxes on senior citizens and blind persons. He repeated his view that the state should not get extra revenue from federal reforms. This was during a time when some legislators were calling for the state to keep the money and spend it. In addition, Wilder wanted to drop the cap on medical expense deductions. He said

\textsuperscript{12}\textit{"Government Center Dedicated," Sussex-Surry Dispatch, 29 October 1986, 1.}

this would save Virginia taxpayers $27 million.\textsuperscript{14}

The speeches in Surry County and those that followed were important in terms of Wilder’s positioning. In one sense, he appealed to the Old Guard by praising their aphrodisiac, pay-as-you-go financing. But, by saying things as he did, he appealed to a wider spectrum of Virginians. His fights for lower taxes on the poor and attempts to cut the tax on over the counter drugs would resonate well with progressives who had long championed those issues in Virginia. Saying that the state should not get more revenue from federal reforms, and that the state should not simply keep the money and spend it would help him mold himself as a fiscal conservative for 1989.

Taxation was not the only issue Wilder was using to position himself early in his term as Lieutenant Governor. Late in November, 1986, Wilder again used crime as an issue upon which to build a better public image. The occasion was the Eastern Armed Robbery Conference in Virginia Beach. He came out in favor of a plan that said a life sentence automatically entailed no parole. In addition, he said first degree murder should be a minimum 20 year sentence. Under Virginia laws at the time, a lifer could be out in 15 years. A first degree murderer with a 20 year sentence could be out in 12 years. Under Wilder’s plan, capital murderers would get either the death penalty or life without parole. To

open up prison space, he called for alternative sentencing for non-violent offenders. This tough stance on crime brought the praise of the Richmond Times-Dispatch, which termed his speech "a valuable contribution to the public debate."\(^5\) The crime issue allowed Wilder to position himself well. After all, Wilder was now seen as an alternative to the Baliles Democrats who appeared to favor conjugal visits for condemned killers. That image of Democrats was one that the Republicans would not be able to hang on Doug Wilder during the 1989 gubernatorial sweepstakes.

As the year ended, the Robb-Wilder feud was beginning to flare up anew. Before the new year, the fight would come to a head and then die down, not to rise publicly again during Wilder’s term as Lieutenant Governor. This was a feud that could hurt both men. But, it could also help them. Robb could win points for 1988. Wilder could work on creating his independent position for 1989. What happened in December, 1986 was a culmination of everything that had happened between Robb and Wilder since the late 1970s, and what had happened publicly since November, 1985. There were events like the Pickett Affair and Wilder’s attacks on Robb following the 1985 election.\(^6\)


The December war's first shots were fired during late November. Once again, Paul Goldman was the shooter. In a speech in Williamsburg to the First Congressional District Black Caucus, Goldman chastised Robb and the DLC for trying to push blacks and others out of the party in 1988. He added that these same types had tried to keep Wilder from running in 1985. This salvo came at a time when Wilder had been excluded from a DLC event in Williamsburg. Will Marshall claimed that Wilder never joined the DLC. He added that Wilder could come as a guest.¹⁷

Again, Wilder lashed out at the DLC. The venue this time was a television show with Julian Bond. The show was taped in early December, and its contents hit the news immediately. He said the DLC and Jesse Jackson were both wrong. Instead, he called for the Democrats to appeal to all. Additionally, Wilder felt it wrong to make one group more important than the other. He said the DLC never followed up with him about joining. In the DLC's defense, its executive director Will Marshall said the group did not exclude anyone.¹⁸

Then, Chuck Robb unloaded on Doug Wilder. He announced that he would not support Wilder's run for Governor in 1989. Instead, he would back "any other credible Democrat." Later, Robb backed away from this a bit. He did accuse Wilder of pushing Baliles and his supporters aside. Robb added that he had been advised to terminate his association with

To worsen matters, Robb released copies of correspondence related to Wilder. The letters generally attacked Wilder’s independence and said that it would be hard for Robb and others to support Wilder in 1989. The first letter was written in late November, 1985 after Goldman had questioned Robb’s role in the election. In this letter, Robb questioned Wilder’s abilities to manage. He told Wilder that many who supported Wilder in 1985 would not be around in 1989 if Wilder and Goldman continued their attacks. In this letter, Robb spelled out what he felt he had done on Wilder’s behalf. He said that his office helped with issues management, fundraising and scheduling. These assertions were in a memo compiled by Robb staffer Judy Griswald. The Griswald memo was attached to the November letter. The second letter was written in August, 1986. It said Wilder was off-base when he claimed that the DLC was trying to take credit for the victories of 1985. Also, in August, Robb aide David McCloud wrote a letter to Paul Goldman complaining about Goldman’s statements. The two met, and McCloud attributed the statements to politics.20

Robb also used the letters to speculate as to why Wilder was lashing out at him. He came up with several reasons that may have explained why. First, Goldman may have been mad that he could not get a job with Robb in 1981. Second, Robb speculated that Wilder and Goldman were jealous that Robb’s benefactors did not donate as much to Wilder in 1985. Additionally, Robb argued that Wilder might be afraid that Robb would run for Governor again in 1989, or that Wilder was trying to "extort" Robb’s support for 1989. Robb also suggested that Wilder was looking for martyrdom should he not win in 1989, and that Wilder was looking to gain more stature nationally than Jesse Jackson among blacks.\(^{21}\)

Actually, Robb seemed to overlook the obvious. Wilder was distancing himself from Robb and Baliles so that he could position himself for 1989. Furthermore, Wilder wanted the appearance that he was his own man, and could win in 1989 on his own merits. And, Wilder wanted any potential rival to know the pitfalls of opposing him for the nomination in 1989. Namely, they would be committing themselves to a fight no one would really win.

Wilder’s reply to the letters was "shock" that Robb would release them. He said he would never have released such letters. He said Robb had created the feud because he did not get enough credit for Wilder’s victory in 1985. Wilder claimed that Robb was really mad at Goldman,

and, "I cannot control whatever Paul says." He said that Robb's actions called into question his ability to be President. Wilder said that he would keep on saying what he believed. He added that it was strange that Robb never simply picked up the phone and discussed his differences. Wilder assured folks that he and Robb were still friends, and that, "I'm only a phone call away."\(^{22}\)

Then, as in the past, Wilder played the race card. He said that the November letter was racial in nature. He referred to the line when Robb referred to "an awful lot of us [who] put our reputations on the line for you." Wilder, claiming to be stunned, said, "What is meant by this is [something] I would not like to believe. That is one of the reasons I didn't answer that letter." Just a few days later, however, Wilder backed away from that statement. He added that he never meant to imply that Robb or the letters were racist. He said he was stunned because the letter seemed out of character for Robb. But, reporters felt that Wilder was changing his tune. They were of the belief that Wilder nodded yes when asked questions regarding the racial nature of Robb's letter.\(^{23}\) The truth would be lost to the ages. Perhaps Wilder was

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looking at some sort of reconciliation with Robb when he recanted his statements. After all, he had already brought in race and galvanized his supporters in the black community. His purposes were served.

The letters did cause another uproar. The state GOP pointed out that Robb staffers doing political work on state time was improper. They wanted to see just how much state money was used. Leading the charge were state party chair Donald Huffman and former Attorney General Marshall Coleman. Calls for an inquiry were wrong according to John Chichester, the man whom Wilder defeated in 1985. Chichester said that such actions were "politics." The most that came of the situation was a GOP resolution calling such actions wrong and saying there should be a state law banning them.  

As the days dragged on, so did the exasperation from the feud. Many were saying it was time for a resolution. One of them was Delegate Tom Moss, who made that assessment at a DLC event in Williamsburg. He said the two should try to work out their differences. Another person who thought this was Governor Gerald Baliles. He announced that he would meet with the two and help them work out their differences.

On the same day of Baliles's announcement, Joel Harris called

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24 Margie Fisher, "Robb Staff Aided Wilder Campaign: GOP Cries Foul as Letters Reveal Administration's Role in Election," A6(M); Dwayne Yancey, "Chichester Rejects Calls for Inquiry: 'That's Politics,'" Roanoke Times and World News, 5 December 1986, A1(M) (Chichester quote); "GOP Criticizes Robb's Help to Wilder," Richmond Times-Dispatch, 8 December 1986, B1(C); Rob Bure, "Republicans Demand Inquiry into Robb's Aid to Wilder's Race," Roanoke Times and World News, 8 December 1986, A1(M).

Robb's office to set up a meeting between Robb and Wilder. The day before, Wilder said he would meet if that would "save the party."

Baliles would not be a party to this meeting. Wilder was painting the meeting request as a unilateral action on his part. Five days later, it was announced that Robb and Wilder would meet in the near future. Baliles had already talked to both of them separately, but nothing came of that.26

The meeting was set for December 17, 1986 at Robb's northern Virginia law office. The meeting actually took place at Robb's home and lasted for three hours. The press was not allowed into the Robb home, but Robb's wife was nice enough to send them some homemade fudge. Both men issued press releases proclaiming the meeting a success. They pledged to continue meeting so that they could avoid future conflict.27

It appeared that the Robb-Wilder feud was over, or at least put to rest for a while. Wilder got what he wanted from the feud. Namely, he was able to distance himself from the Baliles-Robb crowd in the public eye. Furthermore, he was able to establish himself as a power within the party. This would dissuade others from entering the nomination contest for 1989. The fact that he publicly made up with Robb was only a bonus.

One potential rival for the 1989 Democratic nomination was already dissuaded. At the end of 1986, Mary Sue Terry decided not to run for Governor. But, she would not announce that decision for some time. Terry claims that she was looking at wanting to do more as Attorney General. But, the timing of her decision points to something else: she did not want to be in a pitched battle with Doug Wilder. Time as Attorney General could not have been too big a factor. She still had three years left in that office. With Terry out of the way, Wilder was a virtual nominee. After all, most of the anti-Wilder activists were hanging their hopes on Terry.

If Wilder had not established himself early in his term, he would not have been the nominee in 1989. If Wilder had not been able to position himself, Terry would have been able to outmaneuver him for the nomination. Without that nomination, he would not have made history for the second time in the 1980s.

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28 Mary Sue Terry, interview by author, 8 February 1996, Richmond Virginia, Handwritten notes.
Epilogue—And the Rest Is History

It has been said that most people avoid conflict at all costs. Moreover, a few get into conflict and are destroyed by it. And then there is a final select group who seek conflict and master it to their own purposes. That final group, according to the anecdote, are the ones who are the most successful. As 1986 ended, so did the race for the 1989 Democratic Gubernatorial nomination. With the pullout of Mary Sue Terry, there was no serious challenger to Wilder left. The only person who did run was an obscure State Senator, Daniel Bird, who made no headway. The conflict Wilder created and mastered had opened the door for his nomination.

The fights with Baliles and Robb did something even more. They allowed Wilder to run as a Democrat without having to answer for anything in the Baliles years, like sales tax increases or contact visits for death row inmates. But, Wilder, by virtue of being the Democratic nominee, could still take credit for any perceived gains in Virginia during the Robb-Baliles years. The ability to stand away from Baliles would end up being important, according to polling data. A September, 1989 poll showed that 60 percent of Virginians favored a policy change from the Baliles years.¹ Just imagine if Wilder had been a Baliles clone. His Republican opponent, Marshall Coleman, could have attacked him over those objectionable Baliles policies. But, Wilder’s

¹Virginia Commonwealth University, Commonwealth Poll, September 1989. Institute for Research in Social Science, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, Data Library Archival Study Number NNSP-NE-008.
positioning in the first year of his term prevented such attacks.

Wilder’s positioning on the issues did pay off during the 1989 election. On the issue of taxes, Wilder was able to credibly attack Marshall Coleman for not having a record of fighting taxes. On crime, Coleman did attack Wilder for a 1977 vote against the death penalty for those convicted of killing a police officer. But, Wilder’s tough stances in recent years allowed him to blunt attacks that should have doomed a statewide candidate to failure with Virginia’s conservative electorate. Moreover, the success of Wilder’s issue positioning was evident in a September, 1989 poll taken by the Washington Post, which found that Wilder was seen by voters as the better candidate on the specific issues of crime and taxes.² Wilder was successful on these issues because he had staked out his positions in 1986. True to positioning theory, Wilder occupied the top position on crime and taxes.

The first year of Wilder’s term also showed something else. It showed that Doug Wilder could get through tough political times. The building code violations and the uproar over speaking fees would have ended many political careers. But, Wilder had the fortitude to make it through those episodes. Also, the fights with Robb and attacks on Baliles seemed to take some focus off of Wilder’s problems. The speaking fees issue would never rise again. The house would only be briefly mentioned in the 1989 campaign.

In general, Wilder’s term as Lieutenant Governor made it possible

for him to be elected Governor. The first year of his term paved the way
for nomination and severed ties to questionable Baliles policies. Though
the first year is not a sufficient explanation of Wilder’s rise to the
governorship, it is a necessary one. Had he not positioned himself in
1986, Doug Wilder probably would have been pushed aside for the
nomination by someone like Mary Sue Terry or Richard Bagley. Even if
Wilder had secured the nomination, Coleman could have tied him to
Baliles, and that would almost surely have swung the 3500 votes that
would have doomed Wilder to defeat.3 As it happened, however, Wilder did
position himself as an independent power, and was successful.

The first year of Doug Wilder’s term as Lieutenant Governor was
not negative in terms of Wilder’s political development, as some writers
have argued. Other writers, such as Margaret Edds, Donald Baker and
Dwayne Yancey each contribute a piece of the story. But, by not using
positioning theory, they are doomed to seeing 1986 in limited terms.
Indeed, Wilder’s first year was an essential ingredient in his success.
That success is evident when viewed against the backdrop of positioning
theory.

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3 Wilder’s margin of victory was 7000 votes. Author David Jones argues
that Wilder should have won by a much wider margin. He blames racist
voters for the close contest. He writes that racist votes for Wilder would
have been cast anyway. But, he never addresses the high black turnout for
Wilder. Without a black candidate, turnout would have been lower among
both racists for and against Wilder. Thus, the racist votes by blacks and
whites actually cancelled each other out. In addition, Jones fails
miserably when he claims that Marshall Coleman was a weak candidate. For
this discussion, see David M. Jones, Racism as a Factor in the 1989
Gubernatorial Election of Doug Wilder (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin
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Tyler Craddock was born in Martinsville, Virginia on July 1, 1971. He grew up in Henry County, Virginia. He graduated from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in May, 1993, with a Bachelor of Arts in history. After working for a year in newspaper advertising, he returned to Virginia Tech to begin work on a Master of Arts in history. Mr. Craddock plans to return to the advertising field, and hopes to own his own political advertising firm. He is married to the former Miss Tracy Lynn Scoarce of Martinsville. They have one daughter, Kailey Olivia.