



GOVERNOR ROBERT L. EHRlich, JR.
“FACES OF MARYLAND” SPEECH
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January 29, 2003

Senate President Mike Miller; Speaker Mike Busch; Members of the General Assembly; Lt. Governor Steele; Chief Judge Bell; Judge Vaughan; Attorney General Joe Curran; Treasurer Nancy Kopp; Comptroller William Donald Schaefer; members of Congress; county executives and mayors; special guests; friends and fellow Marylanders:

What a tremendous honor it is to be standing before you today as Maryland’s governor.

I am so happy to be here – back with my friends in the Maryland General Assembly.

There are so many good, hard working people on both sides of the aisle – all eager to do what’s right for the citizens of Maryland.

I served here for eight years – a tremendous experience for a young legislator. I’ll always cherish the time I spent here.

I made great friends and benefited from great mentors. Many still serve in this body, and others have joined my administration.

I experienced how the legislative process works, as well as the importance of principled cooperation.

I observed and participated in serious debates about issues that matter to every citizen: crime, drugs, education, healthcare, transportation, tort reform, the Chesapeake Bay, and juvenile justice.

The Maryland General Assembly represents everything that a citizen legislature should be: diverse, collegial, effective, informed and vigilant. Serving here prepared me for the challenges and demands of being an effective public servant.

To all the freshmen members of the Assembly, I encourage you to savor this experience. I also encourage you to make the most of it. You can do that by getting to know some of the veteran members. Neither party has a monopoly on talent in this legislature.

Many of the people in this room represent the best of public service: I would like to single out seven of these long-serving members today.

Together these members have won 126 races and served a total of 225 years in this historic Assembly.

Please stand as I call your name.

- Delegate Wade Kach: 28 years of service.
- Delegate Joe Vallario: 28 years of service.
- Delegate Hattie N. Harrison: 30 years of service.
- Delegate John Arnick: 31 years of service.
- Delegate Pauline Menes: 36 years of service.
- Senator Norman Stone: 40 years of service.
- Senate President Mike Miller: 32 years of service.

It's appropriate to celebrate public service, and the thoughtful people who choose to serve. They symbolize what is good and decent about this historic citizen legislature, and we thank them.

Maryland continues to be an intellectual force powering the region. We possess exceptional institutions of higher education such as Johns Hopkins University and the University of Maryland.

In the field of medical research, Maryland is an international leader, as demonstrated by the world-renowned Johns Hopkins Medicine, University of Maryland Medical Systems, and National Institutes of Health.

Further, NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center and the National Aquarium in Baltimore both speak to the state's reputation as a science center.

The Port of Baltimore is world famous, and we are the center of the biotechnology universe.

Our citizens are highly educated, and our per capita personal income is the sixth highest in the nation.

As citizens of Maryland, we have a lot in which we can take pride. Still, there are areas in which we can do better.

We need to make our streets and communities safer. According to FBI statistics, Maryland continues to be one of the most violent states in the nation.

Further, the link between crime and drugs remains unbreakable. A 2001 study performed at Baltimore City's central booking facility found that nearly three-quarters of arrestees tested positive for at least one drug.

While the need for drug treatment programs is high, the need is not currently being met. Presently, there are 7,500 taxpayer-funded treatment programs in Baltimore City, and an estimated 55,000 people requiring treatment.

When it comes to the environment, there are challenges waiting for us, too.

Despite millions of dollars invested in environmental clean up, the health of the Chesapeake Bay is precarious.

A 2002 study by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation found that the Bay's health, which scored 27 out of 100 in 1998, achieved the same low score in 2002.

You've heard me recite a number of statistics. Statistics are serious business. Sometimes, they can be downright scary. But let me ask you to set them aside for a moment, and consider the people behind the numbers.

Many of the issues facing us seem so difficult, so intractable, that we lose sight of the human face associated with their challenges.

Sometimes we need to see – to touch – to feel – the real impact of these issues on the lives of citizens in order to better understand them.

Sitting in front of you today are five individuals who help us put a "Maryland face" on these issues. Listen to their stories; they encompass so many lessons that can help us achieve a better place to live, grow, work, and prosper.

First, I'd like you to meet Captain Bob Newberry.

Captain Bob is 45 years old and lives in Crumpton, Maryland.

He has been a Marylander since 1966, when his family moved to Queen Anne's County from Philadelphia.

Captain Bob has been a waterman since he was 15 years old. For him, being a waterman means "having something in your blood, and never hating to go to work."

Today he fishes, crabs, harvests oysters, farms, and operates one of the few aquaculture farms on the Eastern Shore.

Three years ago, he took on extra work as a part-time charter boat captain because it was becoming more difficult to earn his livelihood through fishing.

New regulations have harmed his ability to do his job. A significant drop in the Bay's oyster and crab populations are also threatening his industry.

Several years ago, the value of his average daily oyster catch was up to \$2000.

Today, a typical catch falls within the \$400 - \$500 range.

He fears that next year's oyster harvest will be the worst ever.

The blue crab is not faring much better.

Crabs have become increasingly difficult to catch since the 1980s. The female crab population has declined an estimated 80 percent since then, and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation reports that the risk to the remaining population is "high and increasing."

Captain Bob is not the only person whose livelihood has suffered as a result.

There are 7,000 licensed fishermen who earn their livelihood from the sea in Maryland. They are responsible for an estimated 1 million pounds of harvest annually, representing \$86 million in annual income and 3,168 jobs.

Many feel that they have been unfairly blamed for the plight of the Bay.

They note that the poor water quality has killed off underwater sea grasses, leaving crabs vulnerable to predatory fish.

They report that the oyster population is suffering because shells are not being replenished.

These hardy individuals are the stewards of our environment. Many live their entire lives on its banks. They have an intimate appreciation of its beauty, its species, its problems, and its vitality.

It is time to stop blaming them, and to start listening to them.

One day, in the not too distant future, there may be no fish, oysters, or crabs unless we achieved measurable progress in cleaning up the Bay. That means upgrading the 66 major municipal sewage treatment plants that cleanse its waters.

My capital budget makes a \$95 million down payment in this area. That's a good start, but we will clearly need additional resources to get the job done.

We will need to secure more dollars from the federal government in order to complete this critical task. That must be a joint effort between the Assembly and this administration.

The Chesapeake Bay is central to our identity. It permeates every aspect of our economic, ecological, recreational life. Its health affects the livelihood and well being of every Maryland family.

We've heard the phrase "politics ends at the water's edge" a lot since 9/11. I believe that sentiment applies to the waters of the Chesapeake Bay as well.

I believe that we can protect it without unduly penalizing the good people who earn their livelihood from it.

Now, I'd like you to meet Adela Acosta, principal of Cesar Chavez Elementary School in Prince George's County.

We've heard the phrase "no child left behind" in recent years. Adela was the student who simply would not allow herself to be left behind.

Adela was born in Puerto Rico, and later immigrated to New York's Spanish Harlem.

When she enrolled in kindergarten at the age of five, she found it a very scary experience.

"A foreign language enveloped me," she would later write. "English sounded like rocks dropping in a river. My teachers seemed to think that if they spoke to me in a very loud voice I would understand what they were saying."

Eventually, her teachers labeled her as learning impaired, and she was placed in a special education class in first grade.

Fortunately, a social worker discovered her, and she was sent to St. Paul's parochial school. There she learned the joy and power of reading as a means of comfort and escape.

Her fortunes improved, but she faced other obstacles.

Her father – a heroin addict – became blind as the result of a beating by neighborhood bullies. Adela became his surrogate eyes, reading to him, tending to his needs. In effect, she became his teacher.

One day, she informed her eighth grade teacher that she wanted to teach one day. The teacher advised her to go into show business because – and I quote – "you people are so good at it."

Fortunately, Adela decided to follow her heart instead.

She went on to earn an undergraduate degree in Secondary Education from the University of Kansas, and a Master of Science in Education Degree from the University of Kansas.

She has begun doctoral studies in Education Leadership at Nova Southeastern University in Florida.

Today, the girl once dismissed as learning-impaired is a nationally recognized educator.

President Bush appointed her to the Commission on Excellence in Special Education. And First Lady Laura Bush – a former teacher herself – named her a National Role Model for Education Reform.

In 1999 she helped open Cesar Chavez Elementary School. As principal, she presides over a diverse student body: 47 percent Hispanic, 49 percent African American, and 4 percent white. Ninety-nine percent of her students receive Title I funding.

The girl whose potential was once overlooked by her teachers is now looking out for new generations of disadvantaged students.

Because of Adela, no child is left behind at Cesar Chavez!

Adela's experiences as a student and an educator have taught her some important lessons.

She knows that social promotion policy only hurts kids and sends the wrong message to taxpayers.

She knows that every student should compete on a level playing field, and that fully funding the Thornton Commission's recommendations is critical to her mission.

I agree with Adela. That is why our budget increases education aid \$242 million – including \$148 million under the Thornton formula.

She and I both support the establishment of another commission – Thornton II – devoted to an examination of education policy in Maryland. Lieutenant Governor Steele will lead this important effort!

Finally, she supports a real charter school bill that will encourage competition in our public school system. Passing charter school legislation is one of my top priorities for this session.

It is time for this Assembly to enact a charter schools bill with teeth – one that will give disadvantaged students the opportunity to pursue their dreams. I ask you to do so this year.

Now let me introduce you to Keith Day.

Keith is a 45 years old family man. He and his wife Devorah live in Baltimore. They've been married 14 years and have three children.

Keith works as Assistant Manager at the Sheraton Inner Harbor Hotel, where he was named Employee of the Year back in 2001. He is a member of the New Shiloh Baptist Church.

Keith's story is similar to those of tens of thousands of hard working Marylanders. But things haven't always gone easily for Keith.

For 25 years, Keith battled an addiction to heroin. His addiction was so powerful and destructive that he spent three years living on the streets of Baltimore.

His life changed when he connected with the Helping Up Mission, a faith-based organization based in Baltimore.

Each year, the mission serves 150,000 meals and provides 55,000 beds to poor citizens.

However, the mission provides much more than a warm meal and a bed. It serves hope as well.

The mission's innovative spiritual recovery program enables addicts to find the path towards recovery, employment, and better life skills.

The results speak for themselves: program graduates have an 80 percent chance of being employed and sober a year later.

Now Keith is clean, sober, and helping people battle their own addictions by volunteering at in the mission.

Congratulations, Keith

Gun violence – domestic abuse – sexually transmitted disease – lack of educational opportunity – overcrowding in our criminal justice system - over-representation of minority youth in prison – all are directly related to our drug culture.

It cuts through every line in our society.

It does not care about who you are – or what you do – the color of your skin – or the size of your bank account.

It does not discriminate on the basis of race, creed, or color.

It makes us bleed.

It destroys families – and futures.

It strikes fear in the heart of every parent.

I am the parent of a three-year-old – I am scared!

Our budget spends nearly \$136 million on alcohol and drug treatment programs – a 4.2 percent increase over last year in FY 04.

This is a good start, but we can – and must – do better.

We must work together to get non-violent drug offenders out of jail and into treatment programs, where they belong.

We must stress early diversion initiatives. We need to stop routinely condemning so many young offenders to the adult criminal justice system through incarceration and neglect.

We will encourage faith organizations of every denomination to offer treatment programs.

Faith-based initiatives can achieve on a tiny budget results that the federal government and state of Maryland have been unable to duplicate despite spending billions of dollars.

Lieutenant Governor Steele will lead this effort. It will involve every subdivision in our State – it is a priority for our administration.

It's time to facilitate success, and to empower the problem solvers in our society.

Now, let's meet Michael Taylor.

Michael was born in Baltimore in 1958, and attended Hillendale Elementary School. When he was 12 years old, he was placed in the Rosewood Center.

Michael spent the next three decades of his life locked away in institutions.

“While I was in Rosewood, I didn't have my freedom,” Michael later said. “I couldn't decorate my room the way I wanted. I couldn't call people on the phone without permission. I was not happy there.”

The cost of being institutionalized in Maryland for 30 years is conservatively estimated at \$1.6 million.

But we can't calculate the cost it exacted on Michael's quality of life.

Michael was released from Rosewood just four years ago. He began working for the “Living Free Campaign” and “Stand Up and Speak Out” – two groups that promote freedom and empowerment for the institutionalized.

On April 16, 2002, Michael did something he had been waiting to do his entire life.

He moved into his very own apartment.

He calls his new apartment, located in Towson, his “Freedom Pad,” because nobody else lives there.

As Michael gained his freedom, his life started to flourish.

He secured a new job with “Best Buddies of Maryland”. His activism has earned him awards from the State Independent Living Council, Baltimore County Commission on Disabilities, and ARC of Maryland. He also lobbies on behalf of the disabled, so many of you may know him already.

Michael Taylor is an American success story.

He is a Maryland success story.

And he is a success story for any individual who faces obstacles and challenges in his life.

He embodies the success and wisdom of our investment in community-based services.

My 2004 budget includes important programs that will help people in similar circumstances live with independence, dignity, and self-sufficiency. These include:

- \$5.2 million for the Transitioning Youth Program to help youth with disabilities graduate from school into productive living and working environments
- \$6.9 million to fund the Developmental Disabilities Waiting List to get people the services they need now
- \$3.1 million to respond to emergencies faced by families in crisis, such as when an older parent caring for their adult child can no longer provide that care
- \$16 million to increase the wages that personal care workers receive to assist those with disabilities to ensure a high quality of care.
- In total, funding for community services for individuals with developmental disabilities increases by \$38.3 million for FY 2004

Other important funding initiatives I have proposed assist Marylanders with community-based initiatives, including:

- For Seniors: \$7.3 million for 1,000 additional placements for the Medicaid Older Adults Waiver to move people out of nursing homes and back into their homes.
- For Youth: \$1 million for a Juvenile Services Drug Court Initiative to help Maryland’s youth get the drug treatment they need without needlessly filling up state juvenile facilities.
- For people with mental illness: An overall \$66 million increase for FY 03 and FY 04 for the Mental Hygiene Administration community services budget. This money will help restore our public mental health system to ensure that it cares for people in the community again.

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This is a new day in Maryland.

We must usher all Marylanders into the 21st Century by moving people out of institutions and into communities, where they live, learn, work and thrive like everyone else.

It is time to give every Marylander the tools and opportunities to make their own choices.

Our last guest is not with us today.

Rio-Jarell Tatum was the son of John S. Tatum and Roxanne Servance.

They raised the kind of kid that would make any parent proud.

Rio graduated from Baltimore's Polytechnic Institute's rigorous A Course in June 2001.

At Poly, he was captain of the baseball and soccer teams. People remember his blazing fastball as well as seeming inexhaustibility on the athletic field. Others recall his polite, confident, self-assured manner.

But his academic prowess stands out the most. He was a member of the National Honor Society, earning an incredible 3.97 grade point average. In September 2001 he entered Penn State with a full scholarship.

On May 26, 2002, an armed robber shot Rio on a Baltimore street. He died at Shock Trauma.

I wish I'd had the chance to meet this exceptional young man.

The things that made a big difference in his life – sports, scholarships, and family – also impacted mine.

Here is a kid who did everything right, yet still became a victim of the gun violence sweeping our state's largest city.

Rio's story should be a wake-up call for all of us.

As long as gun-toting criminals roam our streets and communities, no one – not even the best and brightest among us – is safe.

That is why it is time to bring Project Exile to Maryland.

During its first year in Richmond, Virginia, Project Exile cut violent crime in half. It is time we bring this successful program to Maryland, too.

Thank you, John Tatum and Roxanne Servance, for joining us here today.

These are just a few of the fascinating people I met during the journey that ultimately brought Kendel, Drew, Michael, Andrea, and I to Annapolis.

As we go about the business of getting our fiscal house in order and making difficult decisions about spending priorities, let's keep in mind these, and so many other faces of Maryland who depend on us to protect them from injustice – provide a cleaner environment – guarantee a quality education – provide temporary assistance when needed – and make our streets safer.

We have an opportunity and an obligation to do great things in each of these critical areas. For that to happen, we must fully embrace the spirit of cooperation I first encountered in these halls as a young legislator so many years ago.

That spirit has stayed with me throughout my public service career, and I am pleased to have the opportunity to bring it back here.

Of course, we will disagree at times – sometimes vigorously. But I am confident these disagreements will not undermine our ability to achieve progress.

That is what the citizens of Maryland deserve.

Maryland faces problems that are daunting, not insurmountable. None will stand when confronted with the energy and enterprise of the people in this room.

I look forward to working closely with each of you. Together we have the chance to change Maryland.

Thank you and God bless you.