

---

# Montgomery Senator Takes Powerful Role On Farms, Ecology

By PETER S. GOODMAN  
Washington Post Staff Writer

3-9-98

---

Maryland Sen. Brian E. Frosh spent last Tuesday on his feet, fighting off an arsenal of amendments he felt would weaken a bill to help clean up the Chesapeake Bay. When one rural senator tried to gut the section forcing major poultry companies to play a role, the environmentally inclined Democrat fired back.

"If we're going to ask farmers to shoulder the burden of cleaning up the Chesapeake Bay, the least we can do is ask . . . big companies to contribute," he said. As for the cost? "It's chicken feed."

His colleagues chuckled at the pun. Then they voted to kill the amendment—the first of many such votes that day.

It was one more small victory for the lean, mustachioed legislator from Montgomery County, an unflinching liberal who once abandoned politics as unholy but came back out of dismay over the election of Ronald Reagan. In his dozen years in the State House, Frosh has risen to become the most prominent advocate for the environment in Annapolis and perhaps the most influential member of the county's legislative delegation.

Now he finds himself playing the pivotal role on an issue Gov. Parris N. Glendening (D) has embraced as one of his highest priorities. Farming interests, led by major poultry producers such as Perdue, are fighting to beat back new regulations aimed at preventing more outbreaks of the toxic microbe *Pfiesteria piscicida*, which last summer killed fish and sickened people on the lower Eastern Shore.

---

See FROSH, C5, Col. 3

# Suburban Senator Takes Key Role on Farm Policy

FROSH, From C1

3-9-98

The Senate adopted the governor's bill last week, but the House of Delegates approved a competing measure backed by farmers, setting up a showdown between the two chambers. Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller Jr. (D-Prince George's) has already tapped Frosh to negotiate with the other chamber.

"I have an awful lot of confidence in Brian," Miller said. "He's a very thoughtful young man."

Such words elicit shudders in some quarters, where Frosh is seen as "too green." Some wonder whether a suburban Washington senator with only one farmer in his district is well suited to change agricultural practice in Maryland.

"He's got a one-track mind," said Frederick W. Nelson Jr., a chicken farmer and president of the Somerset County Farm Bureau, who has clashed repeatedly with Frosh. "He's got blinders on."

It is often said that political power is acquired in the General Assembly more by way of calculated schmoozing and compromise than through expertise. But Frosh's ascendance runs counter to that theory. His rise is explained not by his prowess as a dealmaker—indeed, his opponents find him maddeningly unyielding—but by his patient, earnest efforts at persuasion.

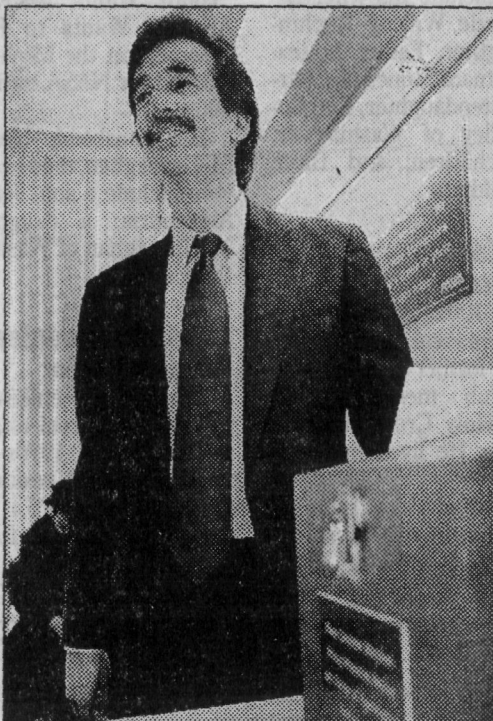
Even opponents find him an effective adversary. "He speaks from the heart on this issue," said Gerard E. Evans, a prominent lobbyist now working against Frosh on behalf of the poultry industry. "He doesn't grandstand, and that's a rare commodity around here."

Not that Frosh won't compromise. Much to the dismay of the environmental lobby, he counseled the governor to exclude a measure from his bill that would force major poultry companies to dispose of the manure their chickens produce, rather than leave the job to the farmers who tend the birds on a contract basis. Frosh liked the idea in concept, but he worried it would expose Glendening to charges he is anti-business. The governor heeded the advice.

"We have a real chance to pass a significant bill this year," Frosh said. "But the bill can only carry so much."

The 51-year-old senator favors no-nonsense ties and dark suits. In the hallways of Annapolis, where fashion and risk-taking don't often dance, Frosh sticks out not a whit. He has a taste for the wry phrase, but he throws no rhetorical bombs.

"Brian Frosh is never going to make a mistake by miscalculation or rash action," said Blair Lee, a former lobbyist for Montgomery



BY TIM SLOAN—THE WASHINGTON POST

**State Sen. Brian E. Frosh doubted he could "handle the insincerity" of running for office.**

County, who has known him since the two worked together for then-Sen. Daniel Brewster (D-Md.) nearly 30 years ago.

Frosh grew up in Bethesda, the son of a judge who once represented a federal employee who took the Fifth in the midst of the McCarthy hearings. After college at Wesleyan University in Connecticut, he went to Columbia for law school, spending summers on Capitol Hill. After law school, he worked for New Jersey senator Harrison A. Williams, who later went to prison as part of Abscam.

"Working on Capitol Hill made me decide that I could never run for public office," Frosh said. "I didn't think I could handle the insincerity of it. I didn't like the stuff you had to do to get elected—raise money, glad-hand people."

By 1976, he was practicing civil law in Washington. Three years later, he moved to Santa Fe, N.M., taking a job pursuing antitrust cases. He liked it there, and might have stayed; then Reagan became president.

"To me, this was just catastrophic," Frosh said. "This movie-actor president and right-wing control of the U.S. Senate. I was upset about this, but basically didn't have anybody to talk to."

Soon he was back home. In 1982, he ran for the Maryland Senate and lost. Four years later,

he won a seat in the House of Delegates. In 1994, he claimed a seat in the Senate.

Frosh has no answer when asked how a guy who grew up surrounded by concrete came to be an environmentalist. He says a water shortage while he was in college made an impression. "I had always left the water running while I shaved or brushed my teeth," he said. "That kind of showed me there were limits to resources."

But Maryland is a state where the environment counts with voters. The Chesapeake Bay is its defining feature. Montgomery County, with its tendency toward liberalism, is particularly fertile ground for a politician to make a career as an environmentalist.

Over the years, Frosh has been handed one opportunity after another to make his mark on the environment. Last year, he brokered deals on the governor's initiative to curb sprawl and the so-called brownfields bill, which shelters companies that clean up polluted sites from liability.

Frosh dismisses the suggestion he is a one-dimensional senator beholden to the environmental lobby. This year, he is sponsoring bills to limit the governor's authority over redistricting, and to restrict public access to auto registration records.

His gentle demeanor aside, Frosh plays an unabashed form of political hardball when it suits him. On brownfields, he saw the bill was of crucial interest to developers who wanted to make use of polluted sites.

In closed-door negotiations with Del. Ronald A. Guns (D-Cecil), who chairs the House Environmental Matters Committee, Frosh let it be known he would let the bill die if Guns didn't agree to strict cleanup standards. (Indeed, he had done just that the year before.) Guns stalled, then bent. The bill passed.

This year, Frosh plans to employ a similar strategy on pfiesteria. Most scientists expect the microbe to bloom anew once the waters warm, and Frosh envisions political peril for those who work against strict limits on farm pollution: rivers closed, the seafood industry teetering, and pictures of sick fish once again dominating the nightly news, just as the governor and all 188 lawmakers are on the campaign trail seeking reelection votes. He figures the other side will have to blink.

As Frosh descended the stone steps of the State House last week, having put down a hostile uprising of amendments, some colleagues shouted congratulations through a chilly drizzle.

Frosh wasn't celebrating. "There's still a lot of time left," he said.