

BLACK: Obama is a beneficiary of the civil rights movement

FROM PAGE 3

come a long way when Governor Wilder was elected in 1990," says Davies. "It indicated that the political scene had improved and expanded to the point where a black man was able to garner enough votes and support to get elected to such a high-profile position. Everyone was proud when he was elected, both whites and blacks alike."

State Sen. A. Donald McEachin, D-Henrico, uttered the same sentiments. "Obviously, I salute Governor Wilder, and I hold his Senate seat today. I appreciate all of the milestones he accomplished and the trail that he blazed not only for me, but for many others. This sort of public service is something I wanted to do since I was a child."

PROGRESS IS MADE

Since first being elected to their respective positions, Both McEachin and Davies have witnessed a certain amount of change for black politicians, not only here in the state, but nationwide.

"I've seen a fair amount of progression," says McEachin. "When I came into the legislature all of the African-Americans represented the majority of African-American districts. In the House now, we have three African-Americans who represent non-African-American districts. I certainly think that is progress. The sheer number of African-American legislators that you have in both the House and Senate is evidence. We have four African-American chairpersons on committees in the Senate, which shows a great deal of progress."

"There has been a great deal of change, and much of it I was able to observe



FILE / THE FREE LANCE-STAR

Former Mayor Lawrence Davies (right) talks with retiring Fredericksburg City Manager Marvin Bolinger in 2003.

through the Virginia Municipal League," says Davies. "When I was elected, Henry Marsh was elected during the same time. There were less than a handful of us who were elected to any kind of office, let alone elected as mayor of a city. There were a couple of blacks who were elected by the council to be mayor.

"Now you see many blacks in city governments, and they've saturated the political landscape and the whole picture has changed. It has become filled with more colorful representation."

Since 1870, 123 blacks have served in the U.S. House of

Representatives; 149 blacks have been mayors; four black governors have been elected; six blacks have served in the U.S. Senate; and a black American is currently serving as the nation's commander in chief. President Barack Obama has set a precedent and is a living testament to what the civil rights movement accomplished.

McEachin believes that for more progress to be made in politics by blacks there have to be more election successes, and efforts by those who are in office to show newcomers the ropes.

"There are a couple of things that need to happen,"

he says. "First, we have to do it again. What I mean by again is there needs to be a second. There wasn't a second African-American governor to follow Governor Wilder. We can't let the Doug Wilders and the Barack Obamas of the world be the only ones. Otherwise, true transformation and true change can't come if that were to be the case."

"The other thing I would say is, it is incumbent on those of us who are in office to reach back to find others who can take our place. We ought to be about the business of grooming them and exposing them to the chal-

lenges we see. Not only the challenges we see on the public-policy front, but also the challenges of getting elected in the first instance and holding public office.

"I know this was something that wasn't forthcoming to me when I ran for office. I'd like to think I'm doing that, and I'd like to think the others who are reaching back now are trying to help the next group of African-American elected officials come along."

Christopher Williams of Spotsylvania County is a freelance writer. E-mail him in care of gwoolf@freelancestar.com.