



A Life of Public Service

An Interview with The Honorable Wes Moore, Governor, Maryland

EDITORS' NOTE Wes Moore is the 63rd Governor of the state of Maryland. He is Maryland's first Black Governor in the state's 246-year history and is just the third African American elected Governor in the history of the United States. Born in Takoma Park, Maryland, on October 15, 1978 to Joy and Westley Moore, Moore's life took a tragic turn when his father died of a rare, but treatable virus when he was just three years old. After his father's death, his family moved to the Bronx to live



Hon. Wes Moore

with Moore's grandparents before returning to Maryland at age 14. Moore is a proud graduate of Valley Forge Military Academy and College, where he received an associate's degree in 1998, and was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army. Afterward, he went on to earn his bachelor's degree in international relations and economics at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, where he graduated Phi Beta Kappa. While at Johns Hopkins, Moore interned in the office of former Baltimore Mayor Kurt Schmoke. Moore was the first Black Rhodes Scholar in the history of Johns Hopkins University. As a Rhodes Scholar, he earned a master's degree in international relations from Wolfson College at Oxford. In 2005, Moore deployed to Afghanistan as a captain with the 82nd Airborne Division, leading soldiers in combat. Immediately upon returning home, Moore served as a White House Fellow, advising on issues of national security and international relations. In 2010, Moore wrote "The Other Wes Moore," a story about the fragile nature of opportunity in America which became a perennial New York Times bestseller. He went on to write other best-selling books that reflect on issues of race, equity, and opportunity, including his latest book, Five Days, which tells the story of Baltimore in the days that followed the death of Freddie Gray in 2015. Moore built and launched a Baltimore-based business called BridgeEdU which reinvented freshman year of college for underserved students to increase their likelihood of long-term success. BridgeEdU was acquired by the Brooklyn-based student financial success platform, Edquity, in 2018. It was Moore's commitment to taking on tough challenges that brought him to the Robin Hood foundation, where he served for four years as CEO. During his tenure, the Robin Hood foundation distributed over \$600 million toward lifting families out of poverty, including in Maryland.

While the Robin Hood foundation is headquartered in New York City, Moore and his family never moved from their home in Baltimore. Moore has also worked in finance with Deutsche Bank in London and with Citigroup in New York.

Where did your interest in public service develop?

There have been several moments throughout my life that have driven me toward a life of public service – the passing of my father, the labor of love my mother exerted after his passing, my service in the Army, leading one of the largest poverty fighting organizations in the country, and now serving as the 63rd Governor of Maryland. Each one of these moments has widened my understanding of why service matters and deepened my passion for serving others.

I've been blessed to work alongside true public servants in every sense of that word throughout my entire life. When I think about why I made the choice to serve, I'm brought back to those moments in my life when people came to

the rescue of me, my family, and my community – without being asked. These tragedies, stories of hard work, and opportunities are what have developed my love for public service throughout my life and what continue to drive me to serve others today.

Will you highlight the priorities for your administration?

Our priority is to create a Maryland that leaves no one behind – it's not just a campaign slogan, it's a governing philosophy. We want to create a stronger and more inclusive state by building an innovative and dynamic economy that tackles the challenges of today and tomorrow, make our communities safer with targeted investments in public safety, and ensure Maryland wins the decade by building a more sustainable state for all.

What is the state of the Maryland economy and how is your administration focusing on job creation?

Since day one, my administration has been preparing for potential economic headwinds. We know our economy is not reaching its full potential. As a result, our fiscal health is falling behind, and our ability to meet the full needs of



Governor Moore speaks at a bill signing



Governor Moore visits Constituent Services

our people is hampered. We are home to some of the greatest institutions of science, healthcare, research, education, and commerce in the world. There's no reason why Maryland should be ranked 47th in the nation for economic momentum.

We need to build a more competitive economy that meets this moment. That's why we have worked so hard to create jobs all across the state. To date, our administration has announced 30,989 jobs across the state. We have sent a clear message that this state is ready to grow, and that our workforce is ready to roll.

Will you discuss your administration's focus on improving education in Maryland and reforming K-12 education?

We've made it clear since day one that we strongly believe every child in Maryland deserves access to world-class public education. And, since then, we've worked hard to provide historic investments in our public schools, expand our teacher workforce, and provide an education that fully prepares our young people. That's why our first budget included a record \$8.7 billion in K-12 public education funding, \$422 million for Maryland's historically black colleges and universities, \$393 million for Maryland's community colleges, and \$122 million for the Educational Excellence Award program, the state's largest need-based student aid program that is projected to serve more than 30,000 students. It is why I signed the Maryland Educator Shortage Reduction Act to address significant shortages in education staff across the state and help current and future teachers succeed.

As a father and as a governor, I know the immense value of our children's education, and how important it is that we build a system that leaves no one behind. Together we will build that system into one that prepares our young people to tackle any challenge and sets our state up for success.

How is your administration dealing with gun violence prevention and public safety in Maryland?

In Maryland, we lose about two people a day to senseless acts of gun violence. Just this summer, we saw one of the most violent mass shootings in our state's history. It should be abundantly clear to anyone in Maryland, and the rest of the country, that we all have to be doing more to prevent these tragedies from continuing to happen.

In my first budget, we put forward serious investment in public safety to tackle these issues head on – \$122 million for local law enforcement

offices, nearly \$17 million towards Baltimore City alone, along with \$11 million to the Maryland Coordination and Analysis Center to expand staffing and invest in technology infrastructure.

We also put forward legislation to address gun violence that will prevent people from carrying guns in preschools, government buildings, and hospitals and prevent people with a history of violent behavior from getting a gun.

Along with this, we created the Safe Summer Initiative, a program led by our Department of Juvenile Services, that prioritizes early intervention to build a more effective, less expensive, and better long-term approach to improving public safety and bolstering opportunity for youth involved in Maryland's juvenile justice system. With this program, we are putting more investment in the high-priority areas of our state that need more help in order to solve the issues that we are facing.

As the state's chief executive, one of my biggest jobs is to ensure the safety of our communities and while other states are loosening restrictions, we've sent a clear message that we are doing what it takes to prevent unnecessary tragedy from continuing to take place in our communities. My administration has shown that we will do what is necessary to make our communities safer and, as long as I am the governor, we will continue to do just that.

Will you discuss your administration's support of veterans?

During our first legislative session, I authored and signed into law two bills focused on supporting Maryland's veterans. The Keep Our Heroes Home Act cut taxes for 33,000 veterans across the state by expanding the military retirement tax exemption to \$12,500 for those younger than age 55, and \$20,000 for those 55 and older; and the Healthcare for Heroes Act, which made Maryland the first state in the nation to create a



Governor Moore meets with the U.S. Climate Alliance Secretariat



Governor Moore attends the Town of Highland Beach 130th Anniversary Celebration

pathway to free dental and healthcare for Maryland's National Guard members.

Our veterans put their lives on the line to protect us here at home, and my administration will continue to act always with their best interests at the top of mind.

How critical is a strong public-private partnership in Maryland and will you highlight your working relationship with the business community?

As a former small business owner, I know how important it is to create an economy that works for everyone – especially for our small businesses which make up an overwhelming majority of the businesses in Maryland. It is essential that we work in partnership with the business community in order to create the innovative economy that we all know is possible.

We need to be doing things that grow our economy from the bottom up and the middle out. That's how we build stronger pathways to prosperity and strengthen the foundation our state stands on. In our first budget, we secured \$1 million to support small businesses and other economic recovery efforts through the Main Street Maryland Program, and another \$1 million to assist businesses seeking to expand telework capabilities for their employees.

In order to build an innovative economy that will tackle the challenges of today and tomorrow, we must equip our businesses with the tools they need to succeed and foster a working relationship with the private sector that benefits all Marylanders.

As you look to attract new industries and businesses to Maryland, how do you define the Maryland advantage?

Maryland is a place where businesses can have it all. If you want beaches, mountains, small towns, or big cities, we've got a place for you – along with one of the most diverse workforces in the entire country. I've been very clear that if you want to build a successful business, or if you are looking to turn your company around, build it in Maryland.

To make this Maryland's decade, we have to be strategic and deliberate, and with the creation of the Maryland Economic Council that is exactly what we are going to do.

We also need to think not only about how we can attract investment from major industries in our state, but how we can support everyday Marylanders as they strive to succeed as small businesses and entrepreneurs. That is why we are creating good paying jobs that give people a chance to climb to the next rung of the economic ladder.

I was a CEO long before I was a governor – I know what it takes to attract businesses. We are moving forward on a path that is going to show organizations from all different sectors that we have the tools they need to be successful. As governor, I will continue to prioritize strong collaboration between the public and private sector as we move in partnership to both a business-friendly community and an economy that protects our working Marylanders.

With so much gridlock and partisanship in Washington, DC, what do you feel are the keys to driving action and achieving results?

In Maryland, we are rising above the partisan divide. In my first legislative session, I authored 10

bills. Every single one of them didn't just pass the legislature, they passed with bipartisan support. We are moving past the notion that we have to care about where an idea comes from. Instead, we are putting our focus on creating ideas that will make Maryland more inclusive and more competitive, and what kind of impact the idea will have. I reject the false choices of today's politics. I'm focused on partnership, not partisanship.

Working together doesn't just sound good, it's the thing that will help us deliver real results for our people. Together, we raised the minimum wage to \$15 an hour, made a pathway to free healthcare for members of the Maryland National Guard, put the resources forward to put an end to Maryland's teacher shortage, and created a one-of-a-kind service-year option for graduating high school seniors.

We showed Maryland that not only can we do big things, but that it is going to be a priority that we do them together.

What do you see as the keys to effective leadership and how do you describe your management style?

Leadership is about showing up and building strong relationships. A great leader is always listening to others and being open to new ideas, which can come from anyone and anywhere.

Since inauguration day, we have made over 150 trips across the state. Presence matters, and I firmly believe that all of our communities deserve to be a part of the decision-making process of this administration. We need to build a table large enough to include everyone – and that's exactly what we are doing. This administration is showing up, listening, and engaging with Marylanders across the state.

One of the first lessons you learn in the Army is that the goal of every mission is to leave no one behind. That is a philosophy that I have centered my entire life on and how I look to manage the state.

What do you tell young people about the importance and fulfillment of a career in public service?

Public service has always been a driving force in my life, from serving in the Army to serving as the Governor of Maryland. Service didn't just change certain aspects of my life – it changed the trajectory of my life. Service put me on a better path.

One of my first priorities as governor was to create a one-of-a-kind service-year program in Maryland that will give graduating high school seniors an opportunity for a paid year of service in whatever field they choose. This opportunity will get more young people to serve together, however they want to do it, and I know that it will create a better home for us all.

My message to any young person is simple: Service will save us. It is how we are going to build better communities, tackle the challenges of tomorrow, form uncommon bonds across communities, and leave a better world for those after us. I encourage every young person to get involved in public service. Here in Maryland, we are giving our youth that opportunity, and it's going to set a national standard for how states look at public service. ●