

CALVERT COUNTY - Congressman Steny Hoyer joined former State Senator Bernie Fowler in his 17th Annual "Wade In" today. The Wade In was started by Mr. Fowler as an unscientific but telling manner of gauging the water quality of the Patuxent River. Congressman Hoyer has attended the "Wade In" for years and served as the Master of Ceremonies for the event this year.

"Bernie Fowler's Annual Wade In highlights an important issue but it also brings the community together to focus in a very up front, personal way," said Congressman Hoyer. "In 1993, Tom Horton wrote an article for National Geographic regarding the overall health of the Chesapeake Bay. He described an ecological collapse and a necessary return to environmental health.

"A decade later, we have made some progress but we must recommit ourselves to the goal that one day Bernie will wade in to his chest and see his toes," Hoyer added.

Hoyer is a long-time supporter of efforts to protect the Chesapeake Bay, the Patuxent River, and other Bay tributaries. As the only member in the House of Representatives from Maryland on the powerful House Appropriations Committee, he is a key leader in securing approximately \$20 million per year in federal funding for the Chesapeake Bay Program, and has helped secure more than \$15 million for the Oyster Recovery Project, and a total of more than \$23 million to improve the oyster population in the Bay and its tributaries over the past decade. Representative Hoyer has also secured over \$25 million in federal funds for programs and projects to improve the environmental health of the Patuxent River, including \$2.7 million for a Patuxent River ecosystem study.

"Mr. Horton also mentioned in the National Geographic article "Bernie Fowler Day" and how much Senator Fowler has done to bring awareness to the issues facing the Patuxent River," added Congressman Hoyer. As a token of our appreciation, I would like to present Bernie with copies of that publication for your grandchildren, so that one day they will know and understand the commitment and dedication you have shown all of us.

"In 1988, the year of the first Wade In, Senator Fowler was only able to walk into 10 inches of water before he lost sight of his white sneakers. Over the years, the depth has steadily increased, but last year it dropped to 24.5 inches - the lowest since 1992 when Bernie waded in 18 inches of the River's water.

"Today is about recommitment for the future. Tomorrow I will join the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the State of Maryland to begin seeding 10 million oysters in a newly established oyster sanctuary.

"This sanctuary will protect critical habitat that benefits the natural resources of the Patuxent River, the Chesapeake Bay and our local communities. It is also an effort to address injuries to fish and shellfish caused by the pipeline that spilled approximately 140,000 gallons of oil at the Chalk Point facility in April, 2000.

"I look forward to continuing to work as a federal partner with all of the dedicated members of our Southern Maryland community to improve the health and beauty of our waterways and I especially appreciate the dedication of my friend, former State Senator Bernie Fowler, in organizing this event every year," Congressman Hoyer concluded.

As a young man in the 1950's Mr. Fowler remembers wading after crabs in the Patuxent River and being able to "see his toes" in chest deep water. Then came the scum and silt and his toes vanished.

In an effort to emphasize the importance of working together to clean up our waterways, particularly those that flow into the Chesapeake Bay, Mr. Fowler has organized the "Wade In." Each year, hundreds of people walk hand-in-hand into the waters of the Patuxent River to gauge the health and cleanliness of the waterway. This year marks the 17th anniversary of the event and the 25th anniversary of the boat trip Governor Hughes took on the Patuxent River to define challenges and pinpoint some solutions to reverse the decline of the river.

Also participating in the Wade In were Governor Bob Ehrlich, Former Maryland Governor Harry Hughes, U.S. Senator Barbara Mikulski, State Senator Mike Miller, State Senator Roy Dyson, Navy Captain Dane Swanson, and local elected officials.

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