

Virginia - 9th District

9 Frederick C. Boucher (D)

Of Abingdon — Elected 1982

Born: Aug. 1, 1946, Abingdon, Va.
Education: Roanoke College, B.A. 1968; U. of Va. Law School, J.D. 1971.
Occupation: Lawyer.
Family: Single.
Religion: Methodist.
Political Career: Va. Senate, 1975-83.
Capitol Office: 1723 Longworth Bldg. 20515; 225-3861.



The Path to Washington: On first impression, the slight, bespectacled Boucher seems poorly matched to the rough-and-tumble politics of southwest Virginia. But this articulate, carefully organized and hard-working young lawyer capitalized on high unemployment in his mountain district in 1982 to oust veteran Republican William C. Wampler.

Their election was the closest in the fiercely competitive "Fighting Ninth" since Wampler lost to Democrat W. Pat Jennings by 999 votes in 1954. The official 1982 tally showed Boucher a winner by 1,123 votes out of more than 150,000 cast.

In spite of his scholarly look, Boucher came naturally to politics. Both his grandfather and great-grandfather served in the Virginia House of Delegates. His father was Commonwealth's Attorney in Washington County (Abingdon).

After graduating from the University of Virginia Law School, Boucher joined the Wall Street firm of Millbank, Tweed, Hadley and McCloy. He took time out to work as an advance man for George McGovern's 1972 presidential campaign. The following year he returned to Abingdon to practice law, ultimately joining his family's firm in 1978. He and his mother operate the firm, with his mother specializing in real estate and Boucher handling trial work.

Following his return to Abingdon he began laying the groundwork for his political debut, which he made in 1975 by running for the state Senate. Energetically buttonholing district convention delegates, Boucher defeated a veteran incumbent for the Democratic nomination, then coasted through the election.

Boucher fashioned a reputation in Richmond as an activist legislator, but he was less than ideological. "I don't like labels," he said. "I'm a pragmatic person." Boucher lacked the seniority to gain a committee chairmanship,

but he promoted a wide variety of legislation. Among his bills were measures to encourage increased oil and gas exploration, to pave secondary roads, to revise the rape laws to encourage greater reporting and to rewrite the marijuana laws to lessen the penalties for use while increasing the punishment for distribution.

Democratic Gov. Charles S. Robb and other state party leaders encouraged Boucher to challenge Wampler in 1982. Viewing the high unemployment in the district's coal fields and the politically marginal nature of the 9th, Boucher was not hard to convince. By mid-March he had begun full-time campaigning, interspersing his frequent travels across the 200-mile-long rural district with trips to Washington to plead with party officials and political action committees for money.

Boucher raised \$241,000, less than Wampler, but enough to finance billboards and media advertising on the three television stations that together blanket the district. As Boucher's name identification increased, Wampler began to react. He sought to dismiss Boucher as "a Henry Howell with an Ivy League look," a reference to the controversial Tidewater populist who lost decisively in his last gubernatorial race in 1977.

But Boucher jabbed back, describing the affable Wampler — known to constituents as the "bald eagle of the Cumberland" — as a nice man but an ineffective legislator who had a minimal impact in Congress. Boucher termed himself the true fiscal conservative, citing Wampler's support for Reaganomics and its ensuing budget deficits.

The economy was a powerful issue. In some of the district's coal counties, unemployment approached 20 percent during the fall of 1982. Turnout there approached the level of the 1980 presidential election, and Boucher,

Frederick C. Boucher, D-Va.

Virginia 9

The "Fighting Ninth" is so named because of its fiercely competitive two-party system and its ornery isolation from the Virginia political establishment in Richmond.

Southwestern Virginia was settled by Scotch-Irish and German immigrants who had little in common with the English settlers in the Tidewater and Piedmont regions. The Civil War divided the antiseccession mountaineers from slaveholding Confederates elsewhere in the state. In the postwar era, when Democrats routinely dominated Virginia politics, the 9th was the only district in which Republicans were consistently strong.

But as the state GOP has moved into alliance with Richmond's business establishment, the party has lost ground in the 9th. Some of the region's burley tobacco growers and other small-scale farmers now are teaming with the traditionally Democratic coal miners. When Democrat Charles S. Robb won the governorship in 1981, the 9th gave him 56 percent, his third highest tally among all Virginia districts.

Democrats are strongest in coal-mining

Southwest — Blacksburg; Bristol

counties along the Kentucky and West Virginia borders. In the 1982 Senate race, Democrat Richard Davis carried seven of eight border counties. But here as elsewhere in the district, the parties are closely matched; several pro-Davis counties chose Republican William C. Wampler in House voting.

Republicans have an edge in the corridor of counties roughly traced by Interstate 81 as it runs north from Bristol past Blacksburg. Republican Paul S. Trible Jr. took all but one of the eight counties in that region in his 1982 Senate contest.

Blacksburg, the district's largest city, is atypical of the 9th. Home to Virginia Tech University, the state's largest, it is a tidy and prosperous-looking city quite unlike the dreary factory and coal towns common throughout the district. Fed by a Tech enrollment boom, Blacksburg's population burgeoned 227 percent during the 1970s, to more than 30,000.

Population: 538,871. White 523,299 (97%), Black 12,920 (2%). Spanish origin 3,045 (1%). 18 and over 388,333 (72%), 65 and over 58,900 (11%). Median age: 29.

drawing on the active support of the United Mine Workers, ran exceptionally well.

Boucher also neutralized Wampler's strength in the Bristol area, just north of Tennessee. In the past, Wampler had run well

around Bristol, his home turf, building up his crucial margin of victory there in his last close race in 1974. But Bristol was also part of Boucher's state Senate district and Wampler was able to win it only narrowly.

Committees

Education and Labor (17th of 20 Democrats)
Elementary, Secondary and Vocational Education; Human Resources; Postsecondary Education.

Science and Technology (26th of 26 Democrats)
Energy Development and Applications; Science, Research and Technology.

Select Aging (31st of 38 Democrats)
Retirement, Income and Employment.

Elections

1982 General

| | | |
|--------------------------|--------|-------|
| Frederick C. Boucher (D) | 76,205 | (50%) |
| William Wampler (R) | 75,082 | (49%) |

District Vote For President

| | 1980 | | 1976 |
|---|--------------|---|--------------|
| D | 84,218 (47%) | D | 87,783 (52%) |
| R | 86,251 (48%) | R | 76,627 (45%) |
| I | 4,573 (3%) | | |

Campaign Finance

| | Receipts | Receipts from PACs | Expenditures |
|-------------|-----------|--------------------|--------------|
| 1982 | | | |
| Boucher (D) | \$241,116 | \$54,111 (22%) | \$233,356 |
| Wampler (R) | \$302,128 | \$160,326 (53%) | \$315,498 |

Key Vote

Adopt nuclear freeze (1983)

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