**Douglas Wilder**, in full **Lawrence Douglas Wilder**, (born January 17, 1931, [Richmond](https://www.britannica.com/place/Richmond-Virginia), [Virginia](https://www.britannica.com/place/Virginia-state), U.S.), American politician, the first popularly elected [African American](https://www.britannica.com/topic/African-American) governor in the [United States](https://www.britannica.com/place/United-States).

Wilder received a bachelor’s degree in chemistry from Virginia Union University (1951) and a law degree from [Howard University](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Howard-University) (1959). He pursued a legal and political career in Richmond, Virginia, and served as a director of the Richmond chapter of the [National Urban League](https://www.britannica.com/topic/National-Urban-League). In 1969 he became the first African American since [Reconstruction](https://www.britannica.com/event/Reconstruction-United-States-history) (1865–77) to win a seat in the Virginia Senate. Wilder, a Democrat, acquired a reputation as a moderate, and in 1985 he was elected state lieutenant governor, the first African American to win statewide office in Virginia. Nominated by the [Democratic Party](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Democratic-Party) for governor in 1989, he narrowly defeated the Republican candidate with 50.2 percent of the vote and took office the following year. He declared his candidacy for the 1992 Democratic Party nomination for the presidency of the United States but withdrew before the primaries began. Constitutionally barred from running for a second consecutive term as governor, Wilder left office in 1994. In 2004 he was elected [mayor](https://www.britannica.com/topic/mayor) of Richmond. Wilder decided not to seek reelection in 2008, and he was succeeded by Dwight C. Jones later that year. Wilder’s memoir, Son of Virginia: A Life in America’s Political Arena, was published in 2015.