

Moderation Arises in Richmond

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Last week a senior Republican legislator, Delegate Harvey Morgan of Gloucester, told the members in a speech on the floor of the House of Delegates that "in 25 years I've not seen such a dereliction of responsibility" as the General Assembly's inability to pass a biennium budget.

"Occasionally," he said, "I've been embarrassed to be a member of the House; now for the first time I am ashamed."

Morgan joined with eighteen other moderate Republicans to work with the Democratic minority in the House to put forth a compromise budget that would raise the sales tax by a half-cent, fund core services of government, reform the tax structure, and likely form the basis for a compromise with the Senate.

"Now is the time to be concerned less about the next election and focus more on the next generation!" Morgan told the House. Morgan's comments were warmly received by his moderate colleagues and the Democrats but got a stony silence from the 49 Republicans led by the Speaker of the House of Delegates who seem more content to close down government than to reform taxes.

At the time this column is being written the House has recessed. The anti-tax group will have several more days to aim their ire at the moderate Republicans and conservative Democrats to try to prevent passage of the bill by the House of Delegates. By the time you read this column you will know whether they were successful. Passage of the bill in the House seems possible but by the narrowest of margins. Hopefully it will have passed, and we will be on our way to a budget compromise. In any event, the moderate Republicans with whom I have been working for several weeks are to be congratulated for their courage in the face of what are likely to be primary challenges next year for many of them.

Between meetings of the House of Delegates I attended a symposium on the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision. Forty years ago Virginia's system of racially segregated schools was found to be unconstitutional. Cases from four states were combined in the *Brown* decision, and a case from Prince Edward County, Virginia, was one of them. While we continue to work to achieve integration of the schools, the Prince Edward County experience is especially interesting in that it started from a student walk-out led by a sixteen-year-old student, Barbara Johns, protesting the paper shanties the African American students attended while the white students went to a brick school.

The use of Massive Resistance that followed the *Brown* decision is a dark chapter in Virginia's history as the Byrd-led Democratic machine attempted to defy the federal government and maintain segregated schools. After many more court decisions, the Massive Resistance effort was broken and school integration began. Moderates and progressives found the courage to stand up and bring about needed changes.

Different eras of history bring different challenges and needs. An open, democratic process is needed for the government to respond appropriately. Moderation can bring about change today as it has in the past.