

Virginia, Is There a Santa Claus?

Kenneth R. "Ken" Plum

Newspapers continue to reprint the 1897 piece "Yes, Virginia, There Is a Santa Claus" written by Francis P. Church of the then New York Sun in response to a letter from an eight-year-old who had asked him for the truth about Santa Claus.

"Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus. He exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist, and you know that they abound and give to your life its highest beauty and joy," Church wrote. "How dreary would be the world if there were no Santa Claus. It would be as dreary as if there were no Virginias."

For some Virginians the world seems like a dreary place this holiday season. Several thousand state employees have been laid off, and all remaining employees have lost their pay raises for the year. For all Virginians there are long lines at DMV offices; higher college tuition and fewer classes; longer waiting lists for mental health, mental retardation and other human services; and fewer solutions for traffic congestion.

And the pain from the economic slowdown is felt in the private sector as well as individuals have lost their jobs and pay raises.

Love and generosity and devotion, as critical as these values are throughout the year, will alone not meet the needs we have in the Commonwealth. We face some critical decisions in the state – many of which will need to be made in the 2003 session of the General Assembly. Your views and suggestions in this process are very important.

Senator Janet Howell and I have mailed a survey to voters to learn of your priorities and to receive your suggestions. Complete and return the survey by mail or electronically at www.janethowell.com. If you do not receive a copy of the survey in the next few days, call 703-758-9733 and request one.

There are several public hearings at which you can also make your views known to us and other legislators. The House Appropriations and Senate Finance Committees will be holding a hearing on Monday, December 30, 2002, at noon at the Ernst Center, Northern Virginia Community College, Annandale Campus. The General Assembly delegation from Fairfax County will hold a public hearing at the Fairfax County Government Center on Saturday, January 4, 2003, beginning at 9:00 a.m. Senator Howell and I will hold our annual public hearing at the Reston Community Center in Hunters Woods on Saturday, January 11, 2003, at 1:30 p.m. I will be holding a community meeting for voters in the Cafetorium at the Cox Communications Building, 3080 Centreville Road, Herndon, on Saturday, January 11, 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. Please plan to attend any or all of these meetings. Hearing your views is very important to the legislative process.

Jane and I wish everyone the happiest holiday season! Best wishes for the New Year. May it be filled with peace, beauty and joy.