

Moderation Prevails

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There were some big-money challenges to the moderate Republican leadership of the Virginia State Senate by conservatives last week, but the moderates prevailed. The President *pro tem* of the Senate and Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee John Chichester faced a well-financed and energetic challenger in a Republican primary. Chichester won by more than a two-to-one margin. What had one of the most powerful men in state government done to incur a challenge from within his own party? He slowed down the car tax cut in order to balance the state's budget.

Senate majority leader Tommy Norment of Williamsburg suffered the same character flaw as seen by the anti-tax, anti-government challengers. Norment had provided leadership along with Chichester to maintain basic government services with a balanced budget even if it meant slowing the pace of the car tax cut. Norment won handily against his millionaire and very nasty challenger.

Another Senate Republican leader, Russ Potts, Chairman of the Senate Education and Health Committee, narrowly got re-nominated by his party by about a hundred votes. The beef against Potts was not so much about taxes as it was that his committee had killed off some of the social conservatives' agenda items on abortion and education.

One exception to the moderate wins was the defeat in a Republican primary of Delegate Jack Rollison of Prince William County, Chairman of the House Transportation Committee. Rollison had the audacity to work up a plan for ending some of the transportation gridlock in Northern Virginia through a referendum for a half-cent sales tax increase devoted to transportation. Rollison campaigned for the increase, but its defeat at the polls last year is history. Now Rollison is history. Northern Virginia lost the chairmanship of a key committee. The gridlock on I-95 will continue mornings and nights. The challenger won by running against a proposed solution to one of the region's toughest problems; he offered no workable solution of his own.

Most of the Republican primaries were expensive and negative. Some of the winners do not face opposition in the general election. With the few seriously contested races shaping up for the fall, it is fairly safe to say that the House of Delegates will continue in its anti-tax, anti-government, anti-abortion, socially conservative ways. The Senate will remain the more moderate body.

Getting legislation passed in a bicameral body is always a difficult task, particularly when the two bodies are as different as they are in Virginia. But with all that difficulty, as a Delegate I continue to be thankful for the other body. The House of Delegates has passed some dreadful legislation in recent years, and the moderates in the Senate have killed it off. It is reassuring to know that those moderates will continue to be there and maybe even a bit emboldened by their successful primary wins.