

## **Seeking Bipartisanship**

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Last weekend twelve Republicans, five Democrats including myself, and one independent, all members of the Virginia House of Delegates, met together with our families for the first ever bipartisan conference. The goal was to meet together with an educational theme, "Young Virginians, Politics and Government: Reaching Your Unclaimed Constituency," discuss common concerns, and get to know each other better on personal and social levels. The conference was managed by former Congressman David Skaggs and his staff of the Center for Democracy and Citizenship at the Council for Excellence in Government, the group that manages bipartisan meetings for the U.S. House of Representatives.

The setting in the City of Staunton in the beautiful Shenandoah Valley on the same weekend as its Victorian Festival could not have been better. Entertainment included attending "A Comedy of Errors" by the Shenandoah Shakespeare Company at the beautiful and authentic Shakespearean theatre, Blackfriars Playhouse. A reception was held at Woodrow Wilson's birthplace.

Two freshman delegates took the initiative in planning the conference, Democrat Chap Petersen of Fairfax and Republican Chris Saxman of Staunton. Everyone had hoped that more than eighteen of the 100 members of the House of Delegates would take part. At the same time there was a great sense of relief that the entire event did not get scuttled when the executive director of the Republican Party was indicted for eavesdropping on a Democratic Caucus conference call and top aides of the Speaker of the House of Delegates and the House majority leader were implicated in the eavesdropping. Everyone at the conference seemed to want to set aside any talk of this unfortunate and illegal act except for the Speaker of the House who in his lunchtime remarks clearly had the subject on his mind by talking about the number of different times dirty tricks were done in politics.

Others at the conference talked about the limited participation of youth in the political process and the cynical views that young people have about politics and the political process. The shrill partisan politics seen in Virginia lately and incidents like the eavesdropping do little to change young peoples' opinions of the process.

One weekend away will not turn the political system around in Virginia. But Democrats and Republicans and Independents talking together about common goals and a shared vision to meet the very great challenges facing the Commonwealth may. I was pleased to be part of this initial effort, and I am committed to a bipartisan approach to meet the needs of the people of Virginia.