

Blue in Northern Virginia

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(Appeared November 10, 2004 in the *Reston Connection* and on □
November 17, 2004 in the *Reston Times*.)

Reston, along with Arlington and Alexandria, has been blue, as in blue for Democratic and red for Republican, during most of its history. That is why the Eighth Congressional District has such an odd shape as Republican gerrymandering packed the majority of Democrats in Northern Virginia into the same congressional district. But the presidential election of 2004 saw a change as almost all of Fairfax County turned blue. Compare the demographic profile of Kerry voters nationally with the population characteristics of education, sex, income, and minorities in Fairfax County, and the two are identical.

The conclusion by most political commentators is that the major issue in the presidential election was moral values. Of greater concern to many in Virginia and countrywide than terrorism, the war in Iraq, Social Security or health care were abortion, gay marriages, and religion. Cultural conservatives have become a dominant force in American politics.

While John Kerry is a man of faith as I consider myself to be, we have a difficult time convincing fundamentalist Christians of that fact. As I heard the Rev. Jerry Falwell explain it on network television, "How can you say you are a Christian if you do not want to outlaw abortions, and you oppose a Constitutional amendment outlawing gay marriages?"

Aside from being on the losing side of a presidential election, the blue of Northern Virginia in a state that is otherwise bright red has implications. For the past several years in the General Assembly, debates on balancing the budget, relieving traffic congestion, and supporting education have been interrupted with a torrent of bills limiting abortion (nearly 30 such bills in one session), displaying the national motto "In God We Trust" and the Ten Commandments, and outlawing gay marriages. Gay marriages have been outlawed in Virginia for decades, but another bill was passed last year and a constitutional amendment has already been introduced for consideration in the 2005 legislative session.

While some of the bills introduced by the cultural conservatives make substantive changes in the law, others seem to be introduced and debated to put an exclamation point on their position and to force litmus test votes to keep wayward legislators in line. While some moderate Republicans strayed from their caucus in 2004 to support a budget compromise, they are less likely to do so next year with the results of the presidential election fresh in their minds and the 2005 elections for the House of Delegates facing them.

Transportation should be the focus of the 2005 General Assembly session, but traffic congestion is a lower priority for the red areas of Virginia that will be pushing their constitutional amendment on gay marriages and their limitations on abortions. Northern Virginians were blue on Election Day, and they are likely to be in a blue mood as the state sets about its priorities for the next several years.