

Your Vote Can Be the Difference

Kenneth R. "Ken" Plum

(Appeared on October 30, 2002 in the *Reston Times* and in the *Reston Connection* as "*Voters Asked to Support State, County Bonds.*")

Congratulations to everyone involved with the Southgate referendum! You performed an amazing feat in getting votes from persons in more than 40 percent of the households in Reston.

An equally important election is scheduled for November 5. No minimum number votes is required to validate the outcome, however. If 40 percent of the registered voters make it to the polls, the turnout will be considered to be very strong. Internet voting is not permitted, but absentee ballots may be cast by mail. Call 703-222-0776 for information on absentee balloting.

There are several extremely important issues on the ballot that I have addressed over the past several weeks in this column and that have gotten little public attention otherwise. Both state constitutional amendments deserve a "yes" vote. One amendment would allow the Supreme Court to consider new evidence after a felony conviction. The numerous examples of persons found wrongfully convicted based on new DNA evidence prove the merit of this amendment.

The amendment to allow local governments to grant property tax relief to charitable organizations within their jurisdiction without review by the General Assembly makes practical sense and will free up additional time for the state legislature to consider statewide public policy issues.

Likewise, the two statewide and two local bond referenda merit support and "yes" votes. The educational facilities bond issue for \$900,488,645 will provide classrooms and academic spaces at colleges, universities, community colleges, and museums throughout the Commonwealth. George Mason University and Northern Virginia Community College get needed classroom spaces as do the other institutions of higher education in the state attended by our young people from Reston and Northern Virginia.

The other statewide bond issue for \$119,040,000 will provide much needed funding for parks and open space preservation. Fairfax County has a \$20 million issue for additional local parks. We simply must preserve more land before it is swallowed up for development. Needless to say, the Fairfax County \$60 million bond issue for a public safety communications and operations center deserves our support.

The issue on the ballot that has been most controversial is the referendum on an additional half-cent on the sales tax for transportation improvements in Northern Virginia. Several groups have short, glib positions in opposition to the tax, but they offer no alternative to solving our gridlock and air quality problems in Northern Virginia.

This may be the only opportunity we get this decade to meet our own transportation needs. We raise the money ourselves; we keep it here and decide how it is to be spent. Almost half goes to mass transit, and it is an important component to putting together the funding for Dulles Rail. I hope you will vote "yes."

It would be unfortunate if a low turnout permitted the naysayers and special interests to determine the outcome of any of these issues. Your vote is needed; it can be the difference.

For more information on any of the issues, visit my website at www.kenplum.com and click on "Recent Communications." Tuesday, November 5, is Election Day. Polls open at 6:00 a.m. and close at 7:00 p.m. See you there!