

TOM DAVIS MAKES THE BIG TIME

By William Nicoson

The Republican Conference of the House of Representatives meets today to chose its leaders for the next Congress. It's likely that Tom Davis, representing more than 560,000 Northern Virginia citizens, including most residents of Reston and Herndon, will be elected one of 5 leaders among 220 GOP members. Not bad for a legislator first elected only four years ago. For the first time in recent Congressional history a legislator from Northern Virginia will participate in the House leadership.

A former Chairman of Fairfax County's Board of Supervisors, Davis will likely become Chairman of the National Republican Congressional Committee which recruits candidates for House seats throughout the country and directs financial assistance to Republican candidates in House campaigns. Davis' political performance in the 11th Congressional District justifies his elevation to such a post. During his four years in the House, he has gathered such political support among swing voters that, in this month's election, he was unopposed by Democrats. Davis raised \$160,000 this year for the NRCC and last year raised \$150,000 for Republican candidates for state legislative seats.

Davis has worked closely with Congressman Bob Livingston who will become House Speaker in the next Congress. House Republican Whip Tom Delay, the only member of the GOP leadership not to be challenged by competing candidates following this month's elections, has worked hard to corral votes for Davis to chair the NRCC. In fact it was Delay, rather than Davis, who first publicly claimed victory for Davis, much to the distress of incumbent John Linder, a close friend of resigned Speaker Newt Gingrich and fellow Georgian.

I first became aware of Davis when we both worked in the Nixon Administration. He was a White House assistant for community outreach or some such euphemism for political counselor. After working on Nelson Rockefeller's campaign staff to defeat Nixon in the 1968 primaries, I was nevertheless asked to direct the New Community Development Program and was just the sort of unreliable moderate that Nixon's political counselors were inclined to monitor closely. Neither Davis nor any other White House overseer of the bureaucracy intervened in management of my program though it might have been manipulated to make substantial political hay for the Administration.

Davis has demonstrated his own dedication to moderation by working hard for Senator John W. Warner's renomination by his party in 1996 under challenge from Oliver North. But Davis gets along well with conservative leaders of his party, as evidenced by his appointment, in his first year of House service, to chair the Subcommittee on the District of Columbia during D.C.'s perilous financial crisis. His leadership in this post has been widely acclaimed by Representatives of both parties.

Davis also serves on the Transportation Committee of the House and, if elevated to leadership status, will be well positioned to champion rail and bus initiatives in the Dulles Corridor in association with Congressman Frank Wolf in the neighboring 10th District which includes the Herndon and Reston residents not represented by Davis. Wolf serves as Chairman of the Transportation Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee.

When anyone rises to high office, the usual question is what still higher office is in view. Senator Warner's seat will be contested in 2002. He has discussed retiring and may well decide to defer to a loyal lieutenant to carry on his tradition of moderation in the Senate.

William Nicoson is a former publisher of Connection Newspapers.