

Reston's Statehouse Clout

By William Nicoson

In the '80s, Janet Howell presided over what is now the Reston Citizens Association, shaping it into a cohesive forum to determine and advocate publicly Reston's interests particularly in dealings with Fairfax County. Late in the '80s she served as Delegate Ken Plum's Legislative Assistant in Richmond. Making the best use of her experience in public service, in 1991 Ms. Howell ran for the Virginia Senate and won. She's continued to win ever since.

Last week the Northern Virginia Technology Council honored Senator Howell with a Lifetime Achievement Award, the first it has ever bestowed. She co-chairs two committees of the Joint Commission on Technology and Science (composed of both Senators and Delegates), the first charged with formulating a Blueprint for Technology-Based Economic Growth in Virginia, and the second with resolving the prospective year-2000 meltdown. In short, she's not only responsible for attracting technology companies to the state but keeping them healthy after they get here.

Early on Senator Howell achieved another first: she became the first woman ever to sit on the Senate Finance Committee, a prestigious appointment which catapulted her over many colleagues with considerably greater seniority.

She also chairs the Family Violence Commission and two subcommittees of the Crime Commission dealing with issues involving public identification of sex offenders under the federal "Megan's Law" mandate, and issues involving civil commitment. This year the Virginia Fraternal Order of Police named her "Senator of the Year", and Victims and Witnesses of Crime, Inc. named her "Legislator of the Year".

Senator Howell and Delegate Plum make a powerful team on the "money" issues. Mr. Plum, a member of the Appropriations Committee, recalls that when he was first elected to the House of Delegates 20 years ago his constituents received 60 cents in state services for each tax dollar spent on transportation, but they now receive \$1.20, double the former value returned.

Delegate Plum chairs the Joint Commission on Technology and Science, which is staffed year-round, and co-chairs the House of Delegates Committee on Science and Technology. Republican Governor Gilmore has just appointed him as one of two Democratic legislators to the 35-member Commission on Information Technology. Mr. Plum is also the principal organizer of the Dulles Corridor Rail Association, a bipartisan group dedicated to bringing rail to the Dulles Corridor by 2010. With all these responsibilities, he has somehow found time this year to chair the Virginia Democratic Party.

I asked both members of this dynamic duo what they thought of term limits. Both thought terms for unproductive legislators should properly be limited at the ballot box. They believe that public

servants who do a good job should be retained in the interests of constituents rather than rejected because of their experience.

I've long felt that families and businesses choosing where to locate in the Washington area, while checking out quality of schools, convenience of transportation and community amenities, would be well advised to check as well the clout of local legislators. I'm a life-long Republican, but I have to recognize that the team Reston has sent to Richmond is a powerful force in attracting economic growth, and Reston's residents and businesses can only benefit from their clout.

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