

AN ELECTORAL SILVER LINING? NO, TWO.

By William Nicoson

*“Was I deceived, or did a sable cloud
turn forth her silver lining on the night?”*
– John Milton, *Comus*

After the sudden judgment revealed on every election night, defeated politicians and their supporters “just look for the silver lining,” in the words of the song. Sadly, as a rule few are to be found outside poetry. But last week’s state and county elections may prove the exception. Leaving aside the wounds of defeated politicians, disappointed voters of both parties may find favorable local prospects resulting from outcomes they sought to prevent.

The big news, drawing national media coverage, was the GOP’s capture of a working majority in the Virginia House of Delegates. For the first time since the Civil War aftermath, Republicans will control, beginning in the year 2000, both houses of the General Assembly and the principal elected offices in the executive branch of government.

To Northern Virginia voters, regardless of party, there is one prospective consequence of the election of positive significance. Two years from now, if the Republican majority is retained, Del. Vince Callahan (R), who represents Herndon, Great Falls and McLean, is likely to become sole chairman of the Appropriations Committee, where all spending bills of the legislature originate. Until 2002 under the power-sharing arrangement negotiated between the parties, Callahan shares chairmanship of the committee with Del. Vivian Earl Dickinson (D) representing, among other counties, Goochland and part of Spotsylvania. I understand that Del. Dickinson is a fine fellow, but may consider that the interests of his down-state constituents differ significantly from those of Northern Virginia residents.

The battle of our local political leaders to reduce highway congestion, increase mobility of workers and visitors, and contain air pollution through bus rapid transit and rail serving the Tysons-Corner-to-Dulles corridor will require stiff appropriations by federal, state and local government as well as private-sector contributions. Callahan has been a vigorous supporter of this effort. Do Northern Virginia Democrats sense a silver lining in the night?

In Fairfax County elections, it is the Republicans who were dismayed. In a sensational upset, Supervisor Bob Dix (R) has been turned out of office by first-time office-seeker Cathy Hudgins, whose margin of victory far exceeded expectations. Republican challenges to two incumbent Democratic supervisors were also turned aside by substantial margins. The Democratic majority on the Board of Supervisors was increased to 7-3.

One of the obstacles to smooth decision-making by supervisors on issues vital to the interests of residents in the Hunter Mill District, including Restonians, has been partisan division between

Dix and Chairman Kate Hanley. Cathy Hudgins was schooled in local governance and electoral politics as a staffer for Hanley. Will Hudgins, as part of a strong Board majority and with close ties to the Board Chairman, be able to bring home more bacon than her constituents have come to expect? Do Reston Republicans sense a silver lining in the night?

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