

VIRGINIA CAPITOL CONNECTIONS

QUARTERLY MAGAZINE

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I'm not rude.
I'm just **NEW**
NORMAL



OKAY, WHATEVER
I AM RUDE AND I'M NEW

PLEASE
WEAR A MASK
VIRGINIA



WEAR A
MASK
VIRGINIA!
CONTEST

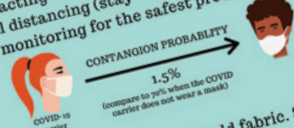
Please be safe and wear a mask for both yourself and others. Support your community.

See all 10 finalists on page 17!



WEARING A MASK
During the COVID-19 pandemic:

QUARANTINE DIY
Make your own cloth mask using old fabric. Search: CDC How To make a Cloth Mask



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Please Wear a Mask
SOURCES: WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION, CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION



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On The Web

www.vccqm.org



My Family's Close Encounter with Covid-19 By DELEGATE DELORES L. MCQUINN

My family's journey through the Coronavirus Pandemic has left us generational memories of an unwelcome guest in my household. With a six-year-old residing in the household, I hope she will learn lessons valuable enough, to share with future generations. Most importantly, I pray that she will inform them, that our survival was only because, during the most difficult experience in my family's history, we were the recipients of God's Grace and Mercy.



The Coronavirus is clearly a test of one's faith. Many are living, surviving, or dying at the mercy of a Pandemic that is obviously, not controlled by any boundaries, and is "no respecter of persons." Its main objective is to find a living organism (human factor) as a host to launch its deadly attack. The world is on pause, as Covid-19, has monopolized, and mounted an attack on men, women, boys, and girls. All indications, speak clearly to the fact, that there are no hiding places from this disease, for the Rich or Poor, Black, or White, Asians or other people of Color, all are victims of this deadly virus. There is no partisan sensitivity or geographical compassion from this disease when it launches its attack. At the mature age of 65, I witnessed like no other time in my life, an epic hand of persevere, endurance, hope, and survival in the

midst of some of my greatest fears. Life or death for my husband, my daughter, and myself was the frightening issue at hand.

Earlier in the article, I talked about my granddaughter, Storie. She has voiced with an abundance of opinions, as to her perspectives on what this virus is or is not. She appears (rightfully so) to have a disdained taste in her mouth for a virus that ran rampantly in her G-LO's and Papa's house. Truthfully, she has become an expert witness on how devastating this disease is and how important it is to follow the CDC guidelines. Frequently, she is quoting what Dr. Sanjay Gupta has said about the disease.

I am willing to share a very intimate conversation that I had with her about the Coronavirus. She is a six-year-old girl who has a knack for creating riddles; I have noticed that she is often wise beyond her years. Every day, there is a new riddle just for old people like me, to figure out. One day after feeling better during my bout with the virus, she asked, "G-LO, do you know why the Coronavirus wants brothers and sisters?"

The question left me pondering how she conceived that the Coronavirus had brothers and sisters. Frankly, I have just learned to play the games she has designed for grandparents. Trying to keep up with her is a major task, so I go along to get along. Getting back to the question, G-LO do you know why the Coronavirus wants Brothers and Sisters?

After pausing for a moment, I said "No." She looked at me with those big bright six-year-old eyes and replied, waiting for me to stop pondering the question. Finally, she said, "G-LO, the Coronavirus wants brothers and sisters, so it can spread." She then asked, "you get it G-LO (as she extended her arms out wide on her side) and it wants brothers and sisters so they can spread out."

Storie in her young mind authenticated one of the main characteristics of this disease, by conceiving that it has the ability to spread fast.

Wow, was my response, for in my household that is exactly what the virus did. We could not see the brothers and sisters, but we quickly became very familiar with what this virus was capable of doing. This Pandemic has notoriously used "weapons of mass destruction." It has left the most vulnerable, weakened, and subjected to death and disabilities. This disease has exposed the many health disparities, which have historically been challenges in Black Communities and Communities of Color. Covid-19 has exposed and magnified the many "dis-ease" of these communities during this health crisis.

The risk factors of contracting this disease must be taken seriously, as we observe daily, the daunting impact on my family, other families across the Commonwealth of Virginia, this Nation, and World.

Storie was clueless as to her little riddle, but so was I, until I heard the renowned Dr. Sanjay Gupta, neurosurgeon, and Medical Commentator on CNN, along with other renowned experts, say that the Coronavirus is like a family with descendants.

My daughter came home extremely ill one Thursday evening in late March. Throughout the week, she had helplessly complained with profound concerns, about several of her colleagues being ill.

"Mom" she said, "I hope they don't have that virus." She actually had conversations with her supervisor about implementing a plan that would create and ensure a more protected environment for her colleagues and clients coming into the bank. She was diligently seeking precautionary measures for her Dad and me.

The broadcasting of vulnerable populations of individuals by age and underlying conditions, she realized that her parents were in the vulnerable and targeted population. In addition to her Dad and me, there was a concern for two daughters, Storie, and her two-year-old sister.

Well the rest is history; the Coronavirus struck the entire household. We all tested positive, it was touch and go, for several days, and my daughter did not realize she was in the "land of the living."

See *My Family's Close Encounter with Covid-19*, continued on page 18

Letters to the Editor

Editor:

In the Spring, 2020, edition of *Virginia Capitol Connections* Quarterly Magazine, Sarah Alderson writes about "Two Democratic Constants in a Sea of Historic Change." It's the story of the service of Senator Richard Saslaw, who is the longest serving member in the General Assembly, and me who is the longest serving member of the House of Delegates. Lots of changes in all those years with the most positive changes coming this year! Thank you, Sarah, for this important "first draft of history."

Delegate Kenneth R. "Ken" Plum
Reston

Editor:

When I was awake during the night last night, I picked up *Virginia Capitol Connections*, a publication I'd never seen before. I looked at your piece, expecting to skim it, but found myself drawn to give it a careful read and even a reread.

I seldom feel moved enough by something I read (reading is a lifelong mainstay for me too) to write to the author. But I find I keep thinking of your words. I feel you expressed so well, so personally and articulately, the strangeness of this pandemic era. You really captured for me the uncertainty of these days—the freedom as well as the accompanying paralysis. And for me the somberness that I so often feel when I consider those who have lost loved ones (I've lost a friend to covid), jobs, and so much more.

Thank you for giving voice, so eloquently, to your feelings, which, while unique, also resonate with what many of us are feeling.

Here's to the day when you can tell your mom the pandemic is over!

April Moore

COVID or Not, Care Needs to Be for All

By DELEGATE IBRAHEEM S. SAMIRAH

We're now five months into the COVID-19 pandemic, and yet the U.S. has broken its daily record for new cases reported. The continued economic impacts of the virus have caused tens of millions to lose their jobs and many more may soon be added to that count as states that "reopened" too early go on lockdown once again.

When we look at these unemployment numbers, we often forget that in the US, losing your job doesn't just mean losing your job. For the half of all Americans who get their health insurance through their employer or a family member's employer, it also means losing your coverage.

The New York Times reported this week that at least 5.4 million Americans have lost their coverage during the pandemic. After taking into account the family members of the newly uninsured, the Kaiser Family Foundation estimates that the number grows to 27 million Americans. There's no question that that includes thousands of Virginians—54 percent of us have employer-sponsored insurance.

Some families will qualify for new plans under Medicaid, but some inevitably won't. Others will struggle to find affordable plans on the individual marketplace despite best efforts by the Affordable Care Act. And for those people, a COVID diagnosis could mean making a choice between getting care or going broke. One health analytics organization estimates that the typical cost for a COVID hospitalization is \$23,500, while another estimates that a cost for a six-day stay with complications averages \$74,000. One woman in New York was charged \$400,000 for her days-long battle with the virus that almost took her life.

But the problem of cost in healthcare is by no means restricted to those who are uninsured, or those who are diagnosed with COVID; despite the fact that only 1 in 10 Americans lack insurance, last year one in three U.S. families put off major medical care, or skipped it entirely, solely because it was too expensive.

This issue is not one that exists anywhere else. When we compare the US to other major countries, we can see that we are spending way more money per person on healthcare than every other country, and yet we still have millions uninsured and underinsured. Average healthcare spending per capita for the average developed nation is \$5,280, while for the US that number is \$10,224.

In fact, the healthcare industry makes up 18 percent of the U.S. GDP. That's about \$3.5 trillion out of our \$19.5 trillion dollar economy. So where is all the money going, if not to our care?

When we look at administrative costs, we begin to answer that question. Administrative costs are the overhead expenses for a company or provider that are not related to medical care, such as marketing, customer service, billing, claims review, information technology, and most importantly, profits. Private insurance companies run a big overhead; some calculations put the number at 13% while others go as high as 18%. That means anywhere between 13 and 18 cents of every dollar you pay to your private insurance plan is used for something other than actual medical care.

Luckily, the problem of administrative costs is not an impossible puzzle to solve. Once again, we can see from other countries that our costs outpace everyone else: administrative costs make up 8.3% of US healthcare spending, compared to 2.7% in Canada, 2% in the UK, and 1.6% in Japan.

Just by looking at public plans here in the US, we can see that healthcare without the high cost is possible. In 2018, Medicare's administrative cost was only 1.1%, meaning only one cent of every dollar paid into Medicare was spent on something other than delivering quality medical care. One reason for the lower administrative cost is



Standing with Those Demanding Justice

By DELEGATE WENDY GOODITIS

The COVID-19 pandemic has created unprecedented challenges for our Commonwealth over the past few months. Governor Northam's administration has implemented a number of measures designed to keep Virginians safe, and we have all had to adapt to a new reality. The Virginia Employment Commission has hired hundreds of new staff members to address the surge of unemployment claims since the start of the crisis. Businesses have had to adopt heightened sanitation and social distancing measures to protect staff and consumers. Now, as the state begins to reopen, local school districts are grappling with back-to-school plans to ensure access to education while keeping students and staff safe. The pandemic has also had a significant effect on our state revenue, though the impact has not been as dire as anticipated, and the General Assembly will convene later this summer to rework the budget.

In addition to budgetary concerns, the special session will focus on police reform. Across the Commonwealth, Virginians have called for action in response to the tragic murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery. I stand with those demanding justice. We must address the systemic racism that persists throughout our institutions including, but not limited to, the criminal justice system. I look forward to working with the Virginia Legislative Black Caucus and community leaders to bring about the change we so desperately need.

Delegate Gooditis is a Democrat representing part of Clarke, Frederick, and Loudoun.



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that Medicare doesn't pursue profits and bonuses for executives the way private insurance does. Another reason is that the unified model of public insurance cuts down on red tape and waste compared to a fractured private insurance marketplace.

When we are in a crisis as deep as the one we face today, policymakers and political figures can't keep proposing that we nibble around the edges of the problem. Anyone who says "healthcare is a human right" is falling short of that promise when they promote a system that ties your healthcare to your employment. A system that extracts more and more profits while families lose everything.

My colleagues and I in Virginia as well as across the country have a duty to change this, COVID-19 or not. It's time to stop treating single-payer healthcare as a dirty word, and instead move towards it as quickly as we can to ensure an efficient system and quality healthcare for all, no matter what.

Delegate Samirah is a Democrat representing part of Fairfax County and Loudoun.

Creating a Virginia that Works for Everyone

By DELEGATE LAMONT BAGBY

In the weeks following the extrajudicial killings of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and the many others whose names we know and do not know, Americans have come together in unprecedented numbers to advocate for social justice and call for greater criminal justice reform. The burden and benefit conferred by our respective skin colors are the result of systems that were built purposefully over centuries to benefit some and subjugate others. The legacy of discriminatory and racist laws and policies creates injustices and disparities across our society including documented, undeniably disparate opportunities and outcomes in health care, economic fortunes, and the criminal justice system. As such, we, as a country and Commonwealth, are forced to again confront the realities of racism and the urgent need for laws and policies that end these injustices, repair the damage they have done, and tear down the systems that sustain them.



As Virginians continue to come together to emphasize strongly and urgently that “Black Lives Matter” – our mission remains clear and of the utmost importance. We will continue working to ensure that Black Lives Matter in criminal justice reform, education, housing, healthcare, economic security, and environmental policy. The Commonwealth is past the point for studies on criminal justice reform and immediate action must be taken to break down systems of oppression and barriers that so many Virginians face daily.

This past Session, we were able to make strides towards these ends. We were able to protect voting rights and tear down barriers to the ballot box. We were finally able to crack down on predatory lenders. We raised the minimum wage and enacted laws to protect workers across the Commonwealth—the list goes on. I am so proud of the work that we have accomplished together but there is more we can do to improve our Commonwealth.

The upcoming special Session provides us with an opportunity to confront and combat racism directly by declaring racism a public health crisis in Virginia, uncovering racial disparities in Virginia’s policies and creating solutions, and requiring courts to publish racial and other demographic data of all low-level offenses. We must continue the fight for criminal justice reform by implementing automatic expungement, reinstating parole, reforming cash bail, and increasing good behavior sentence credits.

We must hold police accountable and improve transparency by creating and funding a civilian review board with subpoena power; abolishing qualified immunity while reforming sovereign immunity; standardizing police administration, training and accountability; expanding the use of body cameras; and requiring independent investigations into all police-involved shootings.

We must prevent the excessive use of force by law enforcement by defining and restricting excessive use of force; banning the use of chokeholds; restricting the use of tear gas, militarization tactics and weapons against civilians; and eliminating the use of “no-knock” warrants. The role of law enforcement in our communities must be redefined by replacing them with trained specialists. This can be done by requiring that behavioral and mental health professionals respond to mental health crisis situations, divesting from large law enforcement budgets and reinvesting in community development programs, and reducing School Resource Officer presence in schools and replacing them with mental health professionals.

In addition to criminal justice and law enforcement reform, we must not fail to address the hardships endured by all Virginians caused See *Creating a Virginia that Works for Everyone*, continued on page 10

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Continuing a Legacy of Innovation Amid COVID-19

By KATY BROWN

There were two types of hungering...hungering in the body and hungering in the soul. I wanted to bring together the actor who was hungering in the stomach and the people I knew best, the people of the Virginia Highlands, because I had a hunch they were hungry for the spiritual nourishment the theatre could bring them.
—Robert Porterfield

When Robert Porterfield, a southwest Virginia native, founded Barter Theatre in 1933, he began the legacy of what would become one of America's most unlikely success stories.

The whole idea sounded crazy: start a professional theatre in Abingdon, Va., in the depths of the Great Depression, hire unemployed starving actors from New York, ask most of them to hitchhike to a town they had never heard of, pay them in produce bartered for admission, borrow furnishings from local residents' homes for props, and expect people in central Appalachian communities to embrace Barter Theatre as their own.

Porterfield's crazy idea worked. At the end of the first season, Barter cleared \$4.35 in cash, two barrels of jelly and a collective weight gain of over 300 pounds. This theatre quickly established a reputation for providing exceptional live productions in a warm and welcoming atmosphere for people from all walks of life, and never engaged in racially-segregated seating.

Getting Barter Theatre through its early years was not an easy task, despite the popularity of "trading ham for Hamlet." But Porterfield, his collaborators and local residents who loved Barter simply refused to abandon it. Porterfield worked for decades at the forefront of the regional theatre movement and kept Barter operating through the 1930s, cultivating an audience that came roaring back once the theatre re-opened after World War II.

Designated as The State Theatre of Virginia in 1946 and awarded the first Tony Award for regional theatre (1948), Barter received the first Virginia Governor's Award for Excellence in Art in 1979, and is the only Virginia organization to have been recognized twice by Dominion Energy ArtStars Awards.

Today, Barter is the oldest year-round AEA repertory theatre in the nation, and is the only professional theatre of its scale and quality located in a remote, rural area. In a typical year, Barter draws 145,000 patrons to a wide variety of professional resident company productions on its two historic stages, in a town of 8,200 people. Barter has also toured shows since its first week of existence, and produced sophisticated shows for young people since 1962.

Of course, 2020 has been anything but typical, yet Barter Theatre has responded to it with an unprecedented level of innovation amid rapidly changing strategies. When Barter closed its doors in March due to COVID-19, we furloughed 90 percent of our employees and immediately set about defining the next steps of our work. We knew the potential existed for hungering among our employees, and that our audience still hungered for the art of professional theatre.

Barter's remaining core functions staff began creating plans for possible new seasons, measuring seats in the theatre to determine capacity that allowed for social distancing, studying CDC guidelines, and focusing on our top two priorities: (1) protecting the health and safety of our staff, volunteers and patrons and (2) ensuring the future of Barter Theatre's service to our immediate region and the Commonwealth.

As a member of Governor Northam's task force to re-open Virginia businesses in phases, I saw clearly that Barter could not safely produce inside its theatres for quite some time. We created several online events and productions, but our audience wanted more. I drove around the local area over and over, looking for suitable alternative venues—fields, amphitheatres, hillsides, parking lots, you name it—but I couldn't stop thinking about the Moonlite Drive-In. Operating on the outskirts of



Abingdon from 1949 to 2013 and listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the Moonlite is one of our region's most nostalgic venues, with thousands of people having fond memories of seeing movies under the stars.

Could a 21st century Barter Theatre somehow find a way to combine the magic of its artistry with the Moonlite's setting? Thus began an adventure that will go down in Barter history: collaborating with the venue's owner to make the Moonlite available; drawing on the support and advice of KVAT/Food City, JA Street and Associates, and Meade Tractor; relying on the skills and contributions of craftsmen, donors, volunteers and staff members who helped transform the drive-in; gaining the help of community leaders, especially those associated with Washington County; marveling at the ongoing generosity of Barter's community of givers; and creating Barter's medical advisory board whose safety guidelines range from quarantines and family units to testing and cleaning protocols. Our Facebook video announcing Barter at the Moonlite garnered over 25,000 views in 72 hours. Barter was no longer just a theatre—it became a rocket ship.

On July 14, Barter at the Moonlite welcomed its first drive-in audience to *The Wizard of Oz* performed live by The Barter Players, our experts in family programming. A large, newly-built stage includes a roof so that shows may continue amid light rain, and patrons receive live audio through their vehicle stereos. Barter has also added a video team that shoots close-ups of the actors and simulcasts them onto the screen above the stage, along with special effects.

Our plan is to perform *The Wizard of Oz* six nights per week through August 8, followed by *Beauty and the Beast, Jr.* starting August 13. These productions run 70-90 minutes with no intermission, making them suitable for audiences of all ages and minimizing the use of restroom facilities. Decisions about fall productions will be made closer to time.

With Barter at the Moonlite underway, we've seen how much our deeply loyal patrons enjoy singing along to the *Oz* songs they love and flashing their vehicle lights in approval. Barter is again uniting theatre artists and audiences to create a shared experience, with memories that last and last. Here in southwest Virginia, in the middle of so much isolation, we all come together, safely distanced around our cars, to celebrate what makes us human under these stars.

Katy Brown became the fourth Producing Artistic Director in Barter Theatre history in October, 2019. For Moonlite tickets and more information, visit bartertheatre.com.



Why We Keep Talking Past Each Other When It Comes to Racism

By DR. LEWIS BROGDON

Racism is a taboo and highly controversial topic often resulting in heated arguments. In these verbal exchanges, emotions run high and understanding rarely happens. In the end, we end up talking past one another. Why do we do this?

The problem begins with our educational system. Racism is not a part of an education in the United States of America. Given the history of Native, African, Asian, and Hispanic Americans in this country, that is striking. Racism at both the individual and structural levels are a big part of the history and experience in America yet we educate masses of citizens to remain ignorant of the violence and exploitation of European colonialism and how it created racism to justify slavery and the genocidal slaughter of millions of indigenous peoples for centuries. Most Americans educated in our schools do not know about the black codes, convict leasing, sharecropping, and the thousands of lynchings attended by tens of thousands of white Americans during the Jim Crow era followed by redlining and mass incarceration. Most Americans do not view racism as a systemic problem but rather an issue of personal bias or prejudice. They lack the historical knowledge and a common conceptual language to have informed conversations with others in the public square. Our schools send out citizens who are very ignorant about racism and it is a recipe for disaster.

While racism is not studied in public schools and colleges, it is spoken of often in public spaces and in our political discourse. Many of these conversations focus on individual experiences and often include uninformed opinions. They lack the grounding in history and the domains of knowledge that give racism context and meaning which is why they become shouting matches with name calling (“race baiter” or “racist”) and accompanying feelings of resentment, confusion, and sometimes instances of violence. We talk past each other, and it is a vicious cycle that weakens our democracy.

There is a second problem. We cannot address something as important as racism with this kind of ignorance. It’s simple. We cannot fix the problems racism created because we will not face our racism as a country. To face our racism is to learn what it is, how it worked historically, how it works today, who benefits from it, and who is negatively affected by it. I created this graphic to help people understand the scope and constituent elements of racism.

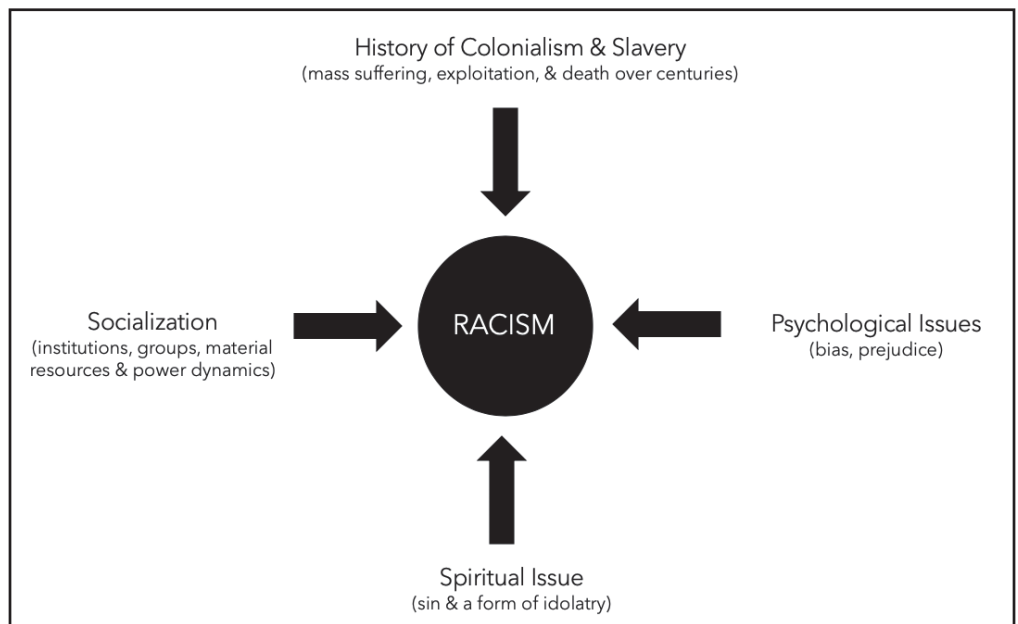
This graphic is a reminder that racism is not for dummies. Opinions and individual experience are both important, but they should not monopolize our understanding of racism and the kind of conversations that are needed to bring

change. Private and public conversations about racism require intelligence if we are ever going to develop an understanding of who we are, how we got here, and how to address the manifold ways racism impacts African Americans and this country. Therein lies a problem. How can you convince a very large group of citizens they have been miseducated as it relates to people of color? Our schools cannot do that by themselves. They need religious institutions to come alongside and give needed moral and spiritual attention to this.



A third problem with us talking past each other on the issue of racism has a moral and spiritual dimension. It has been neglected but bears mentioning. I recently shared my frustration with family and friends on my Facebook page. It encapsulates the frustration many African Americans feel.

One of the most frustrating things about being black and doing justice and advocacy work is the belief that racism does not exist. There are scores of people who really believe this. As a scholar, I spend my days and years conducting research, interpreting data in context, drawing reasoned conclusions, and sharing findings in lectures, courses, articles, and books. Any scholar or student in the field of Black Studies knows the mountains of data out there on racial inequities. And then there is plenty of video evidence of micro-aggressions and violence that blacks encounter in the




streets. Yet, in the face of all this data, many whites persist in the belief that racism is a myth. It is beyond frustrating. No matter how much data and evidence we give, the same illogical conclusion is reached. So, centuries of slavery followed by the black codes, convict leasing, sharecropping, Jim Crow segregation, redlining, and mass incarceration did not happen and doesn't impact African Americans?

I was recently talking with Dr. Kevin Cosby, President of Simmons College of Kentucky (HBCU) in Louisville, and I told him that the Pauline concept of reprobation (KJV) or unproven (NIV) in Romans 1:28 and 1 Corinthians 9:27 helps me to make sense of the kind of ignorance that persists in believing that racism does not exist in face of overwhelming evidence. For Paul, reprobation is a dangerous corruption of the mind that should concern any person of faith. Cosby agreed and said he thinks of reprobation as moral ignorance. He said, "Mental ignorance is when you don't know, whereas moral ignorance is when you don't want to know. It is ignorance rooted in the will, the worst kind to correct." He helped me to understand that the deeper reason why some white people do not even try to understand black experiences of racism is a spiritual and moral issue. Mental ignorance is a reflection of our public-school system not educating us about racism, whereas moral ignorance is a deeper spiritual problem where people insist in denying the truth of racism. This is a complex and thorny issue that religious institutions are uniquely positioned to take up. Seeing the moral nature of the problem provides a way forward.

Religious institutions must come alongside educational institutions to cultivate the values needed that will enable more white Americans to see the need to change the way we educate ourselves. Religious institutions are positioned to do this because growth and transformation are linked to learning new ways of existing in the world. Two values of supreme importance are humility and compassion. Learning about racism and learning how to talk about racism both require intelligence and humility. White Americans must be humble enough to admit what they do not know and the limits of understanding something one does not directly experience. Humility enables real listening to happen and provides an opening for a different kind of conversation, one not characterized by defensiveness and combativeness. Humility, not national or racial pride, shifts the conversations from African Americans trying to prove that racism is real to embracing opportunities to learn about the painful realities of racism. The Bible says that God hates pride and resists the proud because they are rooted in the assertion of the self over and against others. Instead, God gives grace to the humble because, unlike pride, humility is the path to following the commandment to love God and neighbor. Humility, in the end, can change the tenor of conversations about racism, encourage real listening to occur, and allow what's heard and learned to build the compassion needed for white Americans to work for change.

This is what is so exciting about the time in which we find ourselves. We are living in a special moment where thousands of Americans are having honest and difficult conversations about racism, and, interestingly, educational and religious institutions are coming together to tackle these issues. I have been a part of five forums this summer that were joint collaborations between colleges and churches, including one at Bluefield College where I serve as Dean of Institutional Effectiveness. The theme of the forum was "A Time to be Silent and a Time to Speak." We wanted to create space for listening and sharing, not talking past each other. I find that people are listening and open to conversations about making structural changes to address racism. Thousands of people are watching and participating in these forums. That is no small matter. There is great potential for change if we draw on the momentum of this moment and find ways to confront racism while also learning to listen to each other without talking past each other.

Dr. Lewis Brogdon is the Dean of Institutional Effectiveness and Research and Associate Professor of Christian Studies at Bluefield College in Bluefield, Virginia. He is the author of several books and numerous journal articles and book chapters. He is a sought out preacher, lecturer, and panelist. 



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Reforms: *What Now?*

By DR. JANICE UNDERWOOD

“I can’t breathe.”

Those were the final words uttered by George Floyd as a police officer knelt on his neck during the last eight minutes and 46 seconds of his life in Minneapolis, Minnesota. His murder, a 21st century lynching that happened in real-time before all of our eyes, served as a catalyst in a renewed fight for equality and justice across the entire nation and globally that we can’t unsee. But the recent protests that we’ve collectively witnessed against racism and police brutality only reflect a modicum of the injustices that have marginalized millions of people over the last 400 years. We have also witnessed in this renewed fight for justice, legislative reform across many different local and state bodies, as well as the power of the almighty dollar to influence social change. We’ve also seen dozens of companies pander to the will of the people, including compelling an NFL team to face its own ugly racial antecedents.

So, what now?

I now receive daily calls and emails about how to advance diversity and equity reforms. When I get these correspondences, I often wonder what important equity work has been leveraged in these organizations before May 25, 2020, the day George Floyd’s murder changed our whole world during a global pandemic? In what follows is a summary of a candid and recent conversation I had with someone who describes him/herself as an ally. We discussed how to move from ceremonial gestures that confront systemic racism, like the renaming of a football team or the removal of confederate statues to tangible reforms that interrupt long-held systems of structural inequity. Thus, for those of you who are committed to real reform and want to turn away from “a check the box mentality,” I urge you to keep reading and also join in on the conversation.

Usually, during these calls and conversations, the first question that comes to mind is, “how will these reforms align with your mission and strategic plan? If they are not aligned, then any plans for reform will only serve as a wish or a good idea. So, in the same way that I talk to the many leaders who call me for advice, I’d like to encourage YOU reading this to also use your influence to transform your executive leadership, your board room, and the culture of your organization, agency, and departments with systemic changes that are linked to your organization’s overall strategic plan. It’s not enough to want to eliminate systemic oppression in your organization, you must have a strategic plan to dismantle it. For your consideration, I offer the ONE Virginia Plan, a state-wide effort to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion across more than 100 state agencies in the Commonwealth. It is also a model for other public and private sector organizations.

Creating a Virginia that Works for Everyone from page 6

by the COVID-19 pandemic. We need to pass relief and protections related to housing and evictions. This includes, providing rent and mortgage relief, classifying frontline workers as essential workers and requiring that they receive hazard pay and personal protective equipment, and guaranteeing paid sick leave for all workers.

The past two months mark a watershed moment in the history of our country and Commonwealth. This moment calls for bold leadership, as we take the action necessary to swing Virginia towards greater racial and social justice change. I, as well as the members of the Virginia Legislative Black Caucus, am prepared to seize upon the historic opportunity before us to foster a more equitable Virginia that works for everyone.

Delegate Bagby is a Democrat representing part of Henrico. 




Secondly, this idea of racial equity reform is not only a social justice problem, it is a business problem. To be clear, we don’t need another task force to study structural inequity. We have generations of diversity reports that have been well-researched with documented strategies to confront these issues, like the Rumford Fair Housing Act, the Patrick Moynihan Report, the McCone Commission Report, the Kerner Commission Report, the Heckler Report, the National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza Implementation Plan, and — most recently — the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing. So, we must resist being paralyzed by our fears and actually do something about injustice because if we don’t, our businesses, school systems, cities, local and state government, and every other sector that thrives on people will be left behind, or worse. For example, it just makes good business sense to dismantle the biased recruiting and retention system that you have relied on for decades because it has failed you. Start with an independent audit of your entire organization and build a recruiting system that aims to give you the profitable advantage of a diverse workforce. Create a diversity infrastructure with a no-nonsense chief diversity officer that reports directly to the agency head, president, or CEO. Simultaneously, foster a culture change that eliminates the allowance of destructive micro and macroaggressions and a rejection of toxic and manipulative control or power. Take a hard look at your executive leadership. Do they speak about diversity and inclusion from a safe script of talking points or do they “walk the talk?” Walking the talk or visible equity looks like ongoing and multiday racial equity training and an investment in people, policies, and practices. Also, take a hard look at your relationships with people across many dimensions of diversity. Be kind, lead with a sense of humanity, and for goodness sake, stop underestimating/marginalizing your Black and Brown colleagues and friends. Further, you must cultivate your hiring pipeline with the Black and Brown talent you have in-house and reimagine a system of recruitment that prioritizes equity and inclusion. For example, have you heard about the Southern Regional Education Board’s recruitment database of the top PhD’s of color in the nation? If so or not, what other recruiting mechanisms are out there that your organization has marginalized in favor of the familiar recruiting engines and strategies you’ve relied on over the years?

Lastly, we must all re-envision our sense of community engagement. I urge institutions of higher education, businesses, foundations, and state agencies to

- support organizations that fight racial injustice;
- invest in minority and women-owned businesses for procurement;
- mobilize voters; and
- hold politicians accountable with your vote and your donations, especially the ones that would prefer to allow this movement to pass in favor of a return to ignoring white supremacy in plain sight.

Ultimately, I charge each of us to be part of progress. In the Commonwealth we are embracing these kinds of reforms so that our state becomes a more inclusive and welcoming place, so that we can attract and retain the best talent and best businesses and foster an unprecedented sense of inclusion that improves the well-being of everyone who lives, works, visits, and learns in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Therefore, we are fighting every day for those who never had a voice or who have never been in “the room where it happens.” Will you join in this movement? Are you ready to invest in our communities by asking tough questions and having difficult dialogue? Agreed, it’s uncomfortable and will rattle feathers, but in the words of Congressman John Lewis, it’s “good trouble.”

On the other hand, if you’re not ready to have these kinds of hard and long-overdue conversations or participate in on-going personal reflection about the bias you bring to every conversation, decision, or interpersonal interaction you have, ask yourself why not? However, if you’re ready to roll up your sleeves in pursuit of the promise of equality and justice for all, get to work!

Dr. Janice Underwood is the first cabinet-level Chief Diversity Officer for the Office of Virginia Governor Ralph Northam. You can contact her at DEIDirector@governor.virginia.gov 

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The Fate of Richmond's Robert E. Lee Monument By MCCLAIN MORAN

As the video of a Minneapolis police officer kneeling on the neck of an unarmed black man circled media networks, the country cried in protest to the generations of systemic racism and brutality against African Americans. In Virginia, these public demands pressed Governor Ralph Northam to call for the removal of the Robert E. Lee statue, the largest of five statues on Monument Avenue that honor Richmond as the historic capital of the Confederacy.



For some, the monument symbolizes Richmond's industrious history. They fear that the removal of statues will erase history and heritage, citing iconoclasm and fearing that the country will return to division and civil war.

For others, the monument is symbolic of terrorism, memorializing a deathly and painful past wrought with hate, discrimination, and white supremacy. Confederate statues and memorials were scattered throughout public spaces in the South after the Civil War, contributing to nostalgic Confederate rhetoric. Historians argue that these symbols inflated the pride of the four-year, failed rebellion and were a visual element to remind African Americans of their inferiority. The Southern Poverty Law Center estimates that there are about 247 symbols of the Confederacy in Virginia, surpassing all other states (Business Insider).

In the 2020 legislative session, HB 1623 and SB 183 were introduced, combined into HB 1537, and later signed by Governor Northam allowing localities to, "remove, relocate, contextualize, or cover any monument or memorial for war veterans on the locality's public property," providing the locality authority over the disposition of the symbol. Removals are subject to a 60-day process and public hearing. This law successfully allows for the removal of four Confederate statues on Monument Avenue, including J.E.B. Stuart and Jefferson Davis, because the statues were owned by the City of Richmond. However, the effort to remove the 12-ton statue of Robert E. Lee is complicated.

Uniquely, the Lee statue is owned by Virginia, instead of a locality. In 1890, the statue was deeded to the state and signed by Governor P.W. McKinney. Governor McKinney campaigned on ideas of white supremacy, a hatred for Republicans, and apprehension towards African Americans (NGA). McKinney was preceded by Governor Fitzhugh Lee, nephew to Robert E. Lee. On behalf of the Commonwealth, McKinney accepted the statue, pedestal, and land circling the Lee monument. The state agreed to hold the property "perpetually sacred" for the purpose of memorializing Robert E. Lee and "faithfully guard it and protect it." Governor McKinney was accompanied by hundreds of thousands at the celebration of the unveiling of the Lee statue, who revered Lee as the dignitary of the Lost Cause.

Governor Northam and his administration have been strategizing the removal of the towering, 61-foot statue of Lee that overlooks Richmond's historic district. In early June, Northam announced that the statue would be placed into storage, while his administration sought public opinion for the relic's future.

While the Monument Avenue Preservation Society and all nine Richmond city council members unanimously support removing the Confederate statues, the removal of the Lee statue has been halted by multiple lawsuits. The first of which was filed by William Gregory, the great-grandson of two of the signatories of the deed from 1890. Gregory has filed his lawsuit against Governor Northam and Joseph Damico, the Director of General Services.

Gregory's brief directly references the language of the deed to argue that the removal of the statue violates the promise that the Commonwealth made to his family 130 years ago. Additionally, his

brief cites the lawlessness of the defacement of the statues, arguing that the Governor has failed to enforce the Virginia code prohibiting vandalism and destruction.

In support of removal, Attorney General Mark Herring's brief defends the sentiment that the statue represents a glorification of the past. Acknowledging that the Lee statue is on state-owned land, Herring proves that the statue is subject to government speech. A democratically elected governor is not obligated to, "continue broadcasting a message with which it profoundly disagrees or to forever display and maintain, on its own property, a massive statue of a person symbolic of a time it no longer wishes to glorify." Simply stated, government speech allows a democratically-elected representative to relocate or remove government-owned property.

A second lawsuit was initially filed by six residents of Monument Avenue. The plaintiffs argued that the removal of the Lee statue will annul their property's designation as a National Historic Landmark district, devaluing the property and losing beneficial tax breaks. The plaintiffs have since dropped their lawsuit, making Gregory the sole plaintiff against the statue.

Earlier this summer, Judge Bradley Cavedo placed an indefinite injunction to bar Governor Northam from removing the statue until further court decisions. Judge Cavedo has since recused himself from the case, based on his emotional sentiments towards the statues; however, the injunction remains in place.

Attorney General Herring says that he is committed to remove the divisive and antiquated example of propaganda from the heart of the Commonwealth. Governor Northam remains confident that the Commonwealth will prevail in both lawsuits and he has shared his willingness to go to the Supreme Court. The legal battle encircling the statue is far from over.

Today, community members paint phrases on the statue, reading "Black Lives Matter," "No More White Supremacy," and "One Love," in a rainbow of colors. Protestors listen to music, support local vendors, register to vote, and watch projections on the Lee monument, gathering and creating art in a square that was once untouchable. Encircling the statue are memorials to victims of police shootings for visitors to leave cards and flowers. Protestors have also informally renamed the square, "Marcus-Davis Peters Square," memorializing a black man killed by Richmond police in 2018.

Updated: The Washington Post reports that five Monument Avenue residents have refiled their case, arguing that the removal of the statue will depress their property values. William Gregory's case remains active. Since Judge Cavedo's recusal, Judge W. Reilly Marchant has taken over both cases.

On July 23, Judge Marchant heard evidence from the plaintiffs of both cases, William Gregory and the Monument Avenue residents, in two hearings. In Gregory's hearing, Attorney General Herring argued in support of a motion to dismiss the lawsuit and dissolve the existing injunction, indicating that Gregory lacks standing to block the removal of the statue. Judge Marchant extended the temporary injunction against the removal of the statue for 30 days and announced that he would take all requests and evidence under advisement.

As of July 30, Judge Marchant has not ruled on either of the cases and the future of the existing injunction remains unknown.

Continued on next page

“I’ve Got Your Back”

By SENATOR DAVE W. MARSDEN

Editor’s Note: We thank the Richmond Times-Dispatch, where this story first appeared.

The catch phrase, “I’ve got your back” has become ubiquitous in American culture... and mostly it connotes good things. On the battlefield, it means I’m not going to leave you behind; I’m not going to leave you behind; I’m going to lay down covering fire to protect you and expose myself to danger to get you out of a precarious position. Unfortunately, “I’ve got your back” can also be interpreted to mean “I’m not going to say anything about violations of military law or your unethical conduct surrounding the treatment of non-combatants. Much the same can be said for our police departments and the men and women who serve in them. They are there to protect the public but also to protect and back each other up. Unfortunately, it can also mean ‘I’m going to go along with the prevailing attitude in my precinct because I don’t want to be seen as not being a team-player. This can go on in any group setting or work environment. Differing from group norms can expose one to being ostracized, isolated, or even shunned for trying to support written organization policy, procedures, or written mission and values statements.

“I’ve got your back” is a prevailing attitude that needs to be redefined based on what we have experienced in the revelations currently before the American people regarding police conduct. “I’ve got your back” has got to migrate to:

“I am going to have your back by not allowing you to violate legal, procedural, ethical, or moral obligations. In that way I will not only have your back, but I will have the backs of those who we are sworn to protect and serve.”

We can improve the quality and quantity of our training around bias, diversity, use of force and protection of individual rights, but until we break the common practice of covering for friends and co-workers, it is going to be difficult to make the changes that Americans are currently demanding.

When I was Acting Director of the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice (2001-2002), I would address each Juvenile correctional officer training class upon their graduation every six to eight weeks. My message was always the same: “You’ve just been trained by the best staff members we have and understand the framework of what your job will be. When you arrive at your assigned correctional center you will be confronted by very influential co-workers who will advise you ‘that’s not the way we do it here. Forget about what you learned in the academy. This is



Continued from previous page

Cast in bronze and peering at six stories, the Lee statue could be here to stay; however, no longer as a glorification of Robert E. Lee and the failed Confederacy, but as a square for public speech, art, and a path to healing a deeply divided and hurting nation.

McClain Moran is a rising third year student at the University of Virginia, majoring in Leadership and Public Policy within the Batten School and pursuing a minor in Economics. As a student in the Batten School, she is passionate about the public policy process and bridging the gaps between those who formulate policy and those who are affected by it, in the Commonwealth of Virginia and beyond. This summer, Moran is interning for VCCQM.

what we have to do to get the job done here at this facility.’ It is very difficult for workers to resist that peer pressure as it is much easier to go along, get along, and be accepted by everyone as a team player”. I would then advise them that if you go down that road, you may end up in an unfortunate career circumstance. ‘My expectation and advice to you is to find the co-workers at your new facility who are doing the job the way you were taught and follow their lead. You may have fewer friends, but eventually, you will have a more satisfying career on both a personal and professional level.’ Many correctional officers did not take my advice; they fell in with the crowd because it was easier and safer.

This is the challenge facing police officers today. As someone who has run a correctional facility and conducted all of the de-escalation, restraint, and crisis management training for twelve years at the Fairfax County Juvenile Detention Center I can tell you what a difficult choice it is for correctional officers to make. Until we overcome this workplace dilemma, it will be a challenge to reduce misconduct no matter how we try to improve and emphasize enhanced training and more stringent regulations.

When I witnessed the events in Minneapolis that caused the death of George Floyd, I immediately determined that the most likely circumstance was that Derrick Chauvin was one of the most experienced and aggressive thought leaders in his precinct and that the other members were newer and not likely to aggressively challenge his decision-making. It is very difficult for even the best training programs to overcome these human frailties.

We have to create a new paradigm of group interaction in our police departments wherein “I’ve got your back” means ‘I’m going to keep you from doing anything wrong.’

Senator Dave Marsden is a Democrat, representing part of Fairfax County.

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Juneteenth: A Celebration for the Commonwealth

By DR. LAURANETT L. LEE

Governor Northam's office asked me to give remarks at the June 16 press conference recognizing Juneteenth as a holiday. As a Virginian and an historian, I was honored to share a few thoughts about the commemorative event. Following is a slice of the historical background surrounding Juneteenth and resources for further research.



On June 19, 1865, the enslaved people in Galveston, Texas, learned they were now free. Ten weeks after General Robert E. Lee surrendered at Appomattox on April 9, U.S. Major General Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston with 2000 troops. Galveston was a pocket of resistance and hence a slow-dying Confederate enclave. General Granger informed the enslaved people of their new legal status, reading from General Order #3:

"The people of Texas are informed that, in accordance with a proclamation from the Executive of the United States, all slaves are free. This involves an absolute equality of personal rights and rights of property between former masters and slaves, and the connection heretofore existing between them becomes that between employer and hired labor. The freedmen are advised to remain quietly at their present homes and work for wages. They are informed that they will not be allowed to collect at military posts and that they will not be supported in idleness either there or elsewhere."

Some called it Freedom Day; others called it Emancipation Day. Beginning June 19, 1866 African Americans in Texas have held celebrations and since that time it has become an annual event in many localities across the country. Now known as Juneteenth, the event marks the demise of legal slavery in the United States. On June 16, 2020 Governor Northam announced he will support legislation to recognize Juneteenth as an official state holiday. He will be working with legislators to pass a law codifying Juneteenth as a permanent state holiday. In the meantime, employees in the executive branch received a paid holiday.

On the eve of the civil war there were at least half a million enslaved people in Virginia. Richmond, as the capital of the Confederacy, was a major slave trading hub and many thousands of enslaved people were sold and transported west as slave owners initially sought fertile land and later escape from the encroaching Union army. As many as two hundred fifty thousand enslaved people in Texas learned they were finally free. When descendants search their genealogical roots for Virginia ancestors, Texas, is not too far afield. The Texas State Library and Archives Commission will provide a starting place. See: <https://www.tsl.texas.gov>. Another useful research tool for genealogical information is the Library of Virginia's Virginia Untold: The African American Narrative. The pre-1865 primary sources illuminate American history through documentary fragments about African American life. See: <https://virginiauntold@viriniamemory.com> On June 19, 2020, the National Archives announced it had discovered the original document, General Order #3, in their collections. It will be digitized and added to the National Archives Catalog where everyone will have access to read the life-changing words that transformed American life and history. See: <https://catalog.archives.gov>.

Lauranett L. Lee, Ph.D., is a Founding Curator for African American History in the Virginia Museum of History. In 2011, she worked with a team of colleagues at the VHS to launch a genealogical tool called Unknown No Longer: A Database of Virginia Slave Names. She has been co-chair of UR's Presidential Commission for University History and Identity.

The Power of Youth

By NAQUEL PERRY JR.

The things we've accomplished these past couple of months are astronomical. It shows we are more powerful than we realize. From getting the charges of George Floyd's murder upgraded to second degree, NASCAR announcing its ban of Confederate flags, monuments, and names, we prove that as a unit, we are a force to be reckoned with.

The murder of George Floyd caused a worldwide awakening. People who have been silent on issues their whole lives are now speaking up and realizing their privilege, and how they can use that to be an ally to those oppressed. As teenagers who are becoming young adults, we have a job to make sure we are doing our part to make this world a better place.

Hiding behind our game consoles and sports activities will no longer help with what is happening around us. If we want this country to become a better place for our families and peers, we have to unite.

The first action we can take is to vote. Now, to most, voting just means voting in a presidential election. While voting for the president helps, we should put our same focus on our local elections. Examples are for governors, mayors, school board representatives, and city council representatives. The importance of voting for your local officials is that they are responsible for most things in your daily life: policing, public safety, affordable housing, and local roads.

One of the problems is that most eligible voters think their vote does not matter, or that they will not be heard. On the contrary, voting does just that: it lets your voice be heard. Luckily, as the year 2020 progresses, and more situations unfold, young people will realize how important it is to vote.

I have never felt such contentment in my life as when I saw how many different races were out there protesting with us. Often, when such horrific, race-driven incidents occur, we tend to forget just how many non African American allies we have. Knowing how blacks are treated by police, I have noticed non minority people block the police from us, stand on the front lines of marches, and even post and sign petitions in support of justice. Acknowledging that you have privilege, and using it for good is the best way we can fight this crisis that has gone on for the past 400 years.

The majority of past protests have been attended by black people. If you notice, we never get what we demand. This time around, with a diversity of protesters, a lot of our requests are being granted. With that being said, we need to come together as a human race, and fight for what is right.

To any young person reading this, I want you to know that you matter. Your voice matters. Your life matters. I want you to know just how powerful you are. You are the future. We need you now more than ever to stand up and speak for equality, and never to let anyone silence you. It's time for us to step up and make America truly what it was meant to be.

Naquel Perry Jr. is a rising senior at Albemarle High School in Charlottesville. He spoke at a recent governor's press conference. He plans to become a certified public accountant.



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Ready to Lead, Virginia?

BY CYNTHIA E. HUDSON

Like nearly everyone in the world, this past May I watched George Floyd, an African American, die in the street under the apparent full body weight of a white police officer kneeling on his throat – an officer whose manner was so defiant that even in his silence screamed to me, and every African American, "So what? – you're nothing." I felt too in that moment that, like George Floyd, I could not breathe, but resolved that as soon as I could I would speak and, more critically to me, act.



Thanks to Governor Ralph Northam's Commission to Examine Racial Inequity in Virginia Law, created by his Executive Order No. 32 a full year ago, I and my fellow Commissioners have a vehicle for action. We welcome the Governor's charge to send him concrete, effective legislative, regulatory, and policy proposals to cut to the bone this ugly part of the noble and vital service of policing and eliminate the kind of police violence that killed Floyd.

The Commission is not new. We're in "Phase II" of our work following the success of Phase I which resulted in rapid action: repeal by the 2020 Virginia General Assembly of nearly 100 laws still technically "on the books" in Virginia that shamefully still trumpeted the state's racist past including, for example, the "Act to Preserve Racial Integrity."

The Commission has the right tools to advance change toward fair and equitable policing. Starting with data and recommendations from reports such as "Policing Reform for the 21st Century", issued by the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights (kickstarted by findings of President Obama's Taskforce on 21st Century Policing), the Commission is set to advance to the Governor doable, practical actions that be may be either implemented administratively by Virginia's state law enforcement regulatory and public safety agencies, or readily translated to legislative proposals mandating reforms.

The scorched earth approach I envision to policing, and other changes in our state laws to address racial equity, positions Virginia to be among the leaders in this effort. We can help model for the nation at this defining moment policies that can be implemented effectively to bridge the gaping chasm between the treatment of people of color and the treatment of whites in our criminal justice system and other areas. Indeed, it is an understatement to say Virginia has a leading role to play; I submit that Virginia has a responsibility to lead given its foundational contributions to the institutionalized, baked-in racism that has defined the lives of African Americans.

After all, it was Virginia where the first Africans arrived to begin the inhumane experience of hundreds of years of slavery, the vestiges of which still shape the state of African American Existence.

And it is in Virginia, where some cling to the point of violence (Charlottesville 2017) to monuments to the treason from which arose the Confederate States of America, a would-be sovereign entity dedicated to preserving states' rights to continue the enslavement of black people as economic imperative.

Virginia's role in post-Reconstruction policymaking is also notorious, marked as it was by a state constitution that, like others, effectively denied African Americans the right to vote, and paved the way for Jim Crow laws.

Virginia then laid the racism capstone with the codification of massive resistance to public school desegregation, cutting off a primary route by which African American children might level a playing field mined with the obstacles remaining from slavery and Jim Crow.

Occurring in the middle of a viral pandemic disproportionately ravaging the minority communities for reasons also rooted in historical racism, Floyd's killing has been a race relations tipping point that makes the work of the Commission even more urgent. The work on the Commission's agenda includes at this moment (as it did even before

See *Ready to Lead, Virginia?*, continued on page 19



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This Week in Richmond ran for 13 years, and many influential Virginians appeared on over 500 shows. TWIR always provided guests with an opportunity to speak in more than sound bites, and never once was there a request to edit, record again or pull a show.

James Baum and Will Anderson at Blue Ridge PBS saw the need for a public affairs show for SWVA. They chose the name, and the Blue Ridge team became the presenting station. After a year TWIR was virtually statewide with the PBS stations in Harrisonburg, Norfolk and Richmond began airing the weekly shows. Three years ago under the leadership of John Felton, the Community Idea Station in Richmond became the presenting station. This summer VPM cancelled TWIR at the end of its season.

Thanks to each of the many underwriters whose financial support made the shows possible:

M.E. Marty Hall, Jr. who helped secure most of the early underwriters
Donnie Ratliff, Sandy Davis, Elizabeth Newton, McGrady & McGrady, Nuckols Drugstore, Bluefield College, Bernie Henderson (Dignity), Deborah Johnston, Barry Moore (Haley Buick), Roanoke Gas • Associations: VSFA, VSCA



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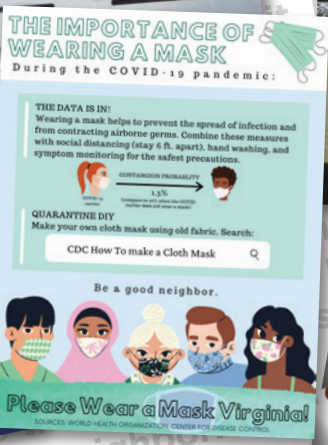
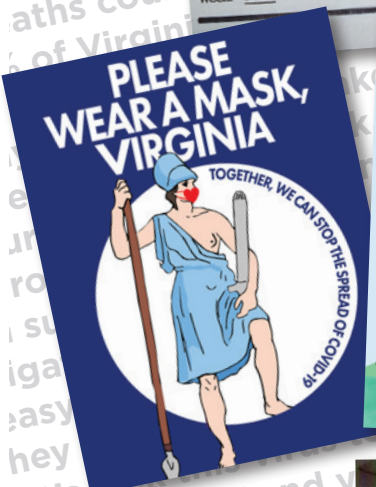
Here are the **11** finalists!

They came from Richmond and Charlottesville, from Greenville and Sandy Hook and Onancock, from Petersburg and Blacksburg and Chesterfield and Lexington and Colonial Beach – they came from all over the Commonwealth. They came from middle schoolers, college students, working adults, and retired folks.

Here are the 11 finalists in the Please Wear A Mask Virginia contest, sponsored by Virginia Capitol Connections and Wordsprint Marketing Services. They are displayed here anonymously, since the final judging has not yet taken place.

First announced on June 1, 2020, the contest encouraged submissions highlighting the importance of wearing a mask to stop the spread of COVID-19. Entrants had a choice of creating a print ad or a video.

In the Fall 2020 edition of this magazine, the winner and runner-up will be announced. First place prize is a \$1000 college scholarship (transferable), or 2 nights at The Commonwealth Hotel in Richmond, winner's choice. Second place is a \$500 transferable scholarship, or 1 night at The Commonwealth, runner-up's choice.



Support for our Colleagues and Friends in the preK-12 Public Schools

By JEFF DAVIS AND ADRIA HOFFMAN, Ph.D.

This has been a summer like no other in education. A time that usually offers an opportunity to recharge, pursue professional development opportunities, and reflect at length has stretched into a season of hard work and sleepless nights for so many teachers, parents, principals, superintendents, school board members, and university educators.

University schools of education and their partners in Virginia's public school divisions work closely on many issues of mutual importance all year long, but summer is a slower time, one of reflection and planning for incremental changes in the upcoming school year. If there are big changes to be made, they might be in just one area of focus.

Not this summer—not this year. This summer involved all parties in constantly working through the many variations of school and university re-openings. Many plans have been drawn up, been changed, and changed back again as our scientific and public health communities' understandings of the Covid-19 pandemic and its implications for school communities became more widely understood. As Virginia's public health district directors articulated during recent school board meetings, major developments continue to occur every two to three weeks.

With insufficient amounts of Covid-19 testing, combined with extended test result times, occurring in our state, and with case and infection rates slowly rising, it is increasingly clear that re-opening our preK-12 schools for in-person instruction this fall would cause serious safety issues for everyone—students, teachers, staff, and families.

Committed as always to their students' well-being, parents, teachers, and administrators began to raise their concerns in many acts of quiet heroism. Administrators and school boards listened to those voices and bravely agreed to do what is necessary, caring, and right given the current state of the pandemic.

Despite everyone's desire to be back together in-person in our school communities, we saw many divisions choose all-virtual starts to the school year. Now, the focus will shift towards engaging, effective virtual instruction to students at all levels, with extra emphasis on assisting students with special needs and those in marginalized communities. It will not be incremental. It will not be in just one area of focus. It will mean even more hard work in the weeks ahead.

In these efforts, our schools of education want our preK-12 partners to know: we fully support you, and we'll be with you every step of the way.

Our pre-service education students and their instructors stand with you. We are always willing to work collaboratively and flexibly with our partners. We're ready to adapt our field placements and co-construct clinical experiences that suit the needs of the preK-12 schools as well as our teacher and leadership education programs.

We know that we can trust our students to their mentors, and we know that they will receive great care and enriching experiences. Now more than ever, we want our students to learn what best meets student and family needs in times of crisis. We want them to participate in the most relevant and timely professional development, from best practices in remote teaching to trauma-informed and anti-racist teaching.



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We're here with you. We know that teachers and learners will face layers of trauma; educators need to make time and space for that. We know that veteran teachers will identify the varied needs of students and families, and we'll make sure our students help you meet kids where they are.

To all of our school and division partners—the welcoming mentor teachers and supportive building administrators, the families in every community, the human resources staff, the division leadership who help us prepare each new cohort of beginning educators: thank you for speaking up and for looking out for our school communities. We are here for you and our Virginia schools, now more than ever. Thank you for all that you do! Let's make this a rewarding, enlightening, and community-strengthening year—together.


Jeff Davis

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My Family's Close Encounter with Covid-19

from page 4

My husband was so ill; he could not do anything, but lay helplessly in the bed. We had medical consultation by phone from several doctors, but it was clear, we just had to wait it out. There were days of chill, high temperature, the metallic taste in your mouth or no taste or smell at all. My daughter had body rash. We suffered with extreme body pain, especially chest and neck pain. There was the constant cough, excruciating headaches. My husband's constant complaints about the pain running through his toes still haunts me. I am sharing this intimate story, because this virus is a serious disease. I want my brothers and sisters to understand the power of this virus as a deadly weapon, it can and will kill you.

With over 130 thousand Americans succumbing to and over 3.8 million Americans having contracted this virus, we need brothers and sisters to first take care of themselves, and then to take care of one another.

As the businesses reopen, brothers and sisters, the message to each of you is, reopening does not give us permission to relax. African-Americans have been affected disproportionately, as we battle a disease that places us a very precarious position.

Therefore, we must work diligently to help our brothers and sisters understand how unmerciful and unrelenting this disease is. We have lost so many of our loved ones. This virus is notorious with an edge on all of us; it can see us when we do not see it. We must continue to practice social distancing, wear a mask, wash our hands, and follow all the CDC guidelines. We can win this battle, but we must stay the course. In Storie's mind, the coronavirus wanted brothers and sisters to spread, but I want brothers and sisters to LIVE!

I think I learned a VALUABLE lesson during this Pandemic from a little person named Storie.

Delegate McQuinn is a Democrat representing part of Charles City, Part of Chesterfield, Henrico, and Richmond City. 

Reflections on Higher Education and International Education in the Time of COVID

By MARK RUSH, PH.D.

As we turn to the 2020-21 academic year, it is evident that the impact of COVID will not abate for some time. Uncertainty abounds with regard to how colleges and universities will open, the sustainability of global education, and the status and careers of our international students. The three are closely related.

To begin, it is vital to do whatever is necessary to maintain global education as an integral part of college and university life. Sending American students abroad and welcoming international students to our universities is an established part of American higher education. According to Open Doors, Virginia hosted 20,452 international students in 2019. In terms of Virginia's current population, that is like adding another city the size of Christiansburg or Culpeper to the commonwealth. Put differently, if all those international students were in one university, it would be bigger than UVA. In 2017-18, Virginia schools sent 12,373 students abroad—essentially, the population of Mount Vernon or Martinsville. Needless to say, Virginia—and, frankly, all states—is highly invested in global education.

Whether motivated by cruelty or myopia, the new guidance proposed by ICE threatened to deport our international students if COVID forced universities to go online. In response to the lawsuit spearheaded by Harvard and MIT, the administration rescinded the new guidelines on 14 July. Notwithstanding the proposed policy's victimization of our international students, it is clear that the policy took no account of the negative impact such a deportation would have had on state and local economies.

A pretense of the rescinded guidelines was that online (or, at least, anything short of fully classroom-based) learning did not justify the presence of international students in the USA. As a result, the definition of what constitutes a fully-enrolled student has become a highly charged matter. Certainly, COVID forces universities to continue to offer classes in online and hybrid formats. But, for some time, universities have experimented with and incorporated new teaching modalities as they have expanded curricula to include high-impact practices such as internships, experiential learning, and community-based learning. Along with lab courses, the rise of educational gaming and other digital coursework, these high-impact practices have taken students out of the classroom or online as part of the dynamic transformation of higher education. All of these modalities have become part of the "normal" breadth of university education. Yet, as demonstrated by the government's attempt to threaten the status of our international students, higher education must now pause to clarify standards and definitions for the new teaching modalities that constitute integral parts of 21st century higher education. Educators must therefore update the terms by which we conduct higher education and, as demonstrated by ICE's attempted attack on international students, to protect all involved from those who



would use vagaries to undermine higher education's mission.

COVID has exposed the fragility of the American model of higher education. Even the best-endowed institutions depend tremendously on the flow of tuition, room and board to sustain their annual operating budgets. The same goes for the many study abroad organizations that make it possible for thousands of American students to go abroad each year. Many have closed for the year. Many are uncertain if they will reopen. This threatens the sustainability not only of the traditional, campus-based model of education but of global education in general.

There is a world beyond the campus and classrooms. Even the best virtual reality technology cannot substitute for being somewhere, dealing with real people, in person. Through the global exchange of students, nations export their values and their cultures and make it easier to collaborate to tackle everything from poverty to climate change to space exploration. Similarly, nations import a greater understanding of other nations' cultures and values. This is a formula for peace, understanding and education. But that formula will fail if it is limited to a small number of CEOs or foreign ministers. By making it possible for students of all backgrounds to deepen and broaden their educations and understanding of other cultures, global education sows the seeds of peace that enhances the capacities of those CEOs and foreign ministers to succeed. And, as noted above, it benefits the local economies of all nations.

It may take decades to assess the impact of COVID accurately. Unquestionably, colleges and universities can and should play a key role in making that assessment. To play that role, our institutions of higher education must reconsider and strengthen relations with their communities, clarify the terms by which we conduct teaching and research, and protect the important investment in global education.

Dr. Mark Rush, Stanley D. and Nikki Waxberg Professor of Politics and Law; and Director of International Education at Washington and Lee University, writes and teaches extensively on voting rights and elections around the world, constitutional issues, and religion. His current research addresses the intersection of law, science, and religion, academic integrity, and statistical analysis of baseball. ▣

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There is a world
beyond the campus
and classrooms.
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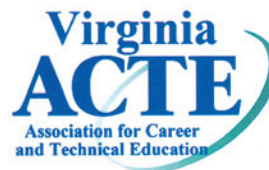
Ready to Lead, Virginia? from page 15

Floyd's death) proposals to break down racial disparities not only in criminal justice but also in education, housing, voting, and healthcare access.

Virginia can be the change sought by so many at this time. It can do that by the good will and action of people who not only state their belief in our collective humanity but go beyond to insist that those in positions to activate solutions do just that. Virginia has more historic reasons than most to lead on fixing racial injustice and inequity in all its forms and

effects. The members of the Commission to Examine Racial Inequity in Virginia Law are glad to do our part.

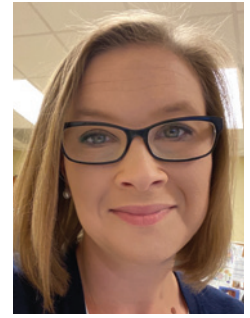
Cynthia E. Hudson is an attorney with Sands Anderson. She assists state and local governments regarding dispute resolution, employment law, and compliance with government administration statutes, among other things. She chairs the Governor's Commission to Examine Racial Inequities in Virginia Law. ▣



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Changes Ahead for Virginia Voters BY ALLISON J. ROBBINS



Virginia Elections will undergo a number of significant changes ahead of the November 3rd, 2020 Presidential Election. The most significant of these changes is the introduction of No-Excuse Absentee Voting which will create the longest Early Voting period in the United States. Additionally, several changes were made to the deadlines surrounding when a ballot can be requested and when a ballot can be returned.

Early Voting

With the passage of HB1 during the 2020 General Assembly session Virginia will now be offering three distinct ways in which all eligible voters can choose to vote.

Vote by Mail

Absentee Voting by Mail has existed in Virginia since the 1800s in various forms. Beginning on July 1st, 2020 any registered voter who chooses may submit an application to receive a ballot through the mail. Ballots will be issued on or before September 18th, 2020. To request an Absentee Ballot by Mail contact your local General Registrar or apply online at <https://vote.elections.virginia.gov>

Vote Early in Person

Early No-Excuse Voting will be available in all localities beginning September 18th, 2020. Any registered voter who chooses may appear in person at the General Registrar's Office, or a satellite voting location, and cast their ballot during the 45 days prior to the November 3rd, 2020 Presidential Election. In Person Absentee Voting will begin on September 18th and end on October 31st. Information regarding Early Voting locations in your community can be obtained from your local General Registrar.

Election Day In-Person Voting

In-Person voting will continue to be available at all regular polling locations on November 3rd, 2020. Precincts will open at 6:00 a.m. and close at 7:00 p.m. To find out where you vote on Election Day contact your local General Registrar or visit the Virginia Department of Elections website at <https://elections.virginia.gov>

Permanent By-Mail Voting

In addition to the expansion of Absentee Voting, beginning on July 1st, 2020 any registered voter can request to receive an Absentee ballot by mail for all elections in a calendar year. (HB 240). Beginning on July 1st, 2021, all registered voters can request to receive an Absentee Ballot by Mail permanently for all elections (HB 207).

Deadline Changes

Several new laws that became effective this year adjust the deadlines surround Absentee By-Mail Voting.

Returning By Mail Ballots

HB 238 and SB 455, extended the period in which an Absentee Ballot can be returned by mail. Absentee Ballots returned by mail must now be postmarked no later than Election Day (November 3rd, 2020) and must be received by the General Registrar by noon on the third after Election Day (November 6th, 2020).

Important Deadlines

Deadlines	Date	Time
Voter Registration Deadline	October 13th, 2020	5:00 PM
Absentee (Early) Voting Begins	September 18th, 2020	Varies by Locality
Absentee Vote By Mail Request Deadline	October 23rd, 2020	5:00 PM
Absentee (Early) In Person Deadline	October 31st, 2020	Varies by Locality
Election Day	November 3rd, 2020	6:00 AM – 7:00 PM

Requesting a By Mail Ballot

HB 239 changes the deadline from 7 days prior to Election Day to 11 days prior to Election Day for Absentee by Mail request to be received. Requests for a by mail ballot must be received by the General Registrar 11 days prior to Election Day (October 23rd, 2020).

In addition to the impacts of expansion of voting opportunities beginning this year, this November's election will also coincide with a worldwide pandemic. COVID 19 has created significant new challenges for the administration of Elections. Our ever-present need for volunteers to serve as Officers of Election is compounded this year due to a high percentage of current officers being in a high-risk category. Additionally, to ensure the safety of Officers of Election and Voters alike, new procedures and resources are needed to limit the spread of the virus.

Officers Of Election

Virginia will need 1,000s of volunteers to serve as Officers of Election in all 133 localities across the state. Officers are needed to serve in various roles at Early Voting satellite locations, inside the General Registrars offices with by-mail voting, and at precincts on Election Day. To volunteer to serve your community as an Officer of Election please contact your local General Registrar or apply online at <https://www.elections.virginia.gov/officer-of-elections/>

Protective Equipment & Procedures

During the May Municipal Elections and the June Primary Elections, the Virginia Department of Elections provided localities with much needed personal protective equipment (PPE). We anticipate needing thousands of more PPE during the November Election. The PPE utilized by our Officers of Election and staff are gloves, masks, and face shields. Additionally, we need single use pens and privacy folders for ballots. Sanitation supplies needed include hand sanitizer, cleaning solutions, and alcohol wipes. Social distancing ground markers and plexiglass barriers are also needed to ensure the safety of both voters and Officers.

Medical Reserve Corps

In addition to Officers of Election, Virginia also has volunteer positions available with the Medical Reserve Corps for medical professional and interested citizens to serve during the Election as Infection Prevention Specialists. For more information and to volunteer with the Medical Reserve Corps, please apply online at <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/mrc/>.

A summary of important deadlines is listed below. For more information regarding the upcoming November 3rd Presidential Election more information is available online at the Department of Elections' website <https://elections.virginia.gov> or by contacting your local General Registrar.

Allison J. Robbins is Director of Elections and General Registrar, and a Certified Va. Registered Election Official (VA-171). She is President of Voter Registrars Association of Virginia; P.O. Box 309; Wise, Virginia 24293; (276) 328-8331

Finally, Respect for Native Americans

By DELEGATE PAUL E. KRIZEK

This week the Washington NFL team made an historic announcement that the franchise will finally retire its racist name and logo. There are several professional sports teams across the United States that reference Native Americans which also should be changed, but the Washington team name was the most egregious. Native Americans are people, not mascots, and I know we all understand that. Imagine attending a game with a friend who is a member of the Oglala Lakota Nation from South Dakota, as I did, and to see their horrified reaction to the team band wearing ceremonial-like headdresses, and to see fans with similar faux Native American garb “playing Indian”. Why was that okay? It was many years ago, and I am still uncomfortable recalling that afternoon. American Indians are not caricatures, and their heritage and traditions should not be appropriated for entertainment. The franchise’s derogatory and degrading team name was never acceptable to begin with when it was chosen 87 years ago, and so the next best time to get rid of it is right now. I applaud this move as an important step forward to reconciling the past. In fact, I sent an email to the owner back in 2011 that I would not renew my season tickets until the franchise changed its name.

In the last two months, we have seen a much-needed spotlight upon the evils of systemic racism and especially the horrific treatment of Blacks by some in our nation’s law enforcement. The impetus, or frankly the last straw, was the gruesome murder of George Floyd. In the aftermath, we have witnessed the removal of Confederate monuments, the rebranding of companies using racist iconography, and the renaming of places featuring the names of controversial historical figures, to name a few long-overdue changes. None of this happened overnight, though it may feel that way. It is important to remember that this particular team name change is the culmination of over nearly a half-century of Native-led advocacy across legal, political, scholarly, and corporate settings. At last, now, at a Washington football game, they are no longer objectified and diminished as a people. As the famous humanitarian and Olympic gold medalist Billy Mills (Oglala) said recently, “...they (Washington) are on the verge of righting an historic wrong.” And, that it is “never too late to do the right thing.”


As Americans and Virginians, we have a long way to go to support and lift up our Virginia tribes, celebrate their rich cultures and traditions, and acknowledge their important contributions to the Commonwealth, and our country. But, there are things we can and are doing legislatively in the General Assembly in Richmond.

Five years ago, I introduced joint resolution HJ 347, passed unanimously by the General Assembly, to designate the day before Thanksgiving as Indigenous Peoples’ Day in the Commonwealth to raise awareness of Native Americans in Virginia and educate the general public on their history and life today, and the diverse, strong cultures of these tribes. Across the country you can find Indigenous Peoples’ Day, or Native American Heritage Day, on the second Monday in October, replacing “Columbus Day”. In my conversations then with local Virginia tribal leaders, the consensus was that celebrating Indigenous Peoples’ Day the day before Thanksgiving was a good way to recognize Virginia tribes and their historic and current contributions to our Commonwealth. That day is an historic one, as it is the day when the Pamunkey and Mattaponi tribes present a deer and turkey to the Virginia governor as part of a 343-year tradition as their

tax tribute. The Mattaponi and Pamunkey have reservations dating back to colonial-era treaties beginning in 1658.

I also may reintroduce my plan for the Tribal Land Repatriation Program and Fund, which would allow Virginia tribes to apply for grants to purchase and recover their historic lands. When Europeans arrived, tribes were met with violence and many were forcibly moved, including the Nansemond and Rappahannock. Only two tribes, the Pamunkey and the Mattaponi, currently own small pieces of their original land. In too many instances, the government took land or was sold tribal land cheaply and did not fully compensate the tribes. We will never be able to right the wrongs done in the past, but we can ensure that these tribes receive future support for repatriation of their land.

Finally, as Chair of the Subcommittee on ABC and Gaming, I supported an amendment to the landmark casino bill that passed this session, which will divert one percent of the casino tax revenue to the Virginia Indigenous People's Trust Fund if the casino is operated by a Virginia Indian tribe. These funds will be distributed to all of Virginia’s federal and state-recognized tribes and can be used for their priorities in education, housing, and economic development, which is how it should be as the federally recognized Chickahominy, Eastern Chickahominy, Upper Mattaponi, Rappahannock, Monacan, Nansemond, and Pamunkey are sovereign nations that can create their own laws, collect their own taxes, and manage their own lands.”

Delegate Krizek is a Democrat representing part of Fairfax. 



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Developing Leaders, Trust, Civility and Respect By LARRY ROBERTS

The Sorensen Institute for Political Leadership has long been associated with helping to develop bipartisan leadership and cultivating the values of trust, civility, and respect that are important to building a reputation on Capitol Square and getting things done in the General Assembly and in state government.

With the dramatic changes that have affected Virginia this year—changing majorities in the General Assembly, the COVID-19 pandemic, economic disruption, interruption of education, and calls for change in addressing inequities in our society—Sorensen remains committed to bipartisan principles.

Our mission in challenging times is to help develop and highlight effective leadership that results from building trust and working together to address the challenges and opportunities that Virginians experience in their daily lives.

We are pursuing this mission with renewed vigor, but with different methods, as our programs have experienced schedule changes and have moved online. This summer, we are running multiple programs at once—including our flagship Political Leaders Program (33 participants), Candidate Training Program (15 participants), and High School Leaders Program (32 participants). Our program participants have been enthusiastic and engaged even as we have not been able to meet in person since our opening Political Leaders Program weekend in March in Williamsburg and Yorktown.

Two key developments have occurred this summer that are building a sense of excitement around Sorensen.

22nd Century Scholars Internship

Upon learning that many students were losing public sector summer internship opportunities due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Sorensen Institute joined with UVA's Center for Politics, Miller Center for Presidential Studies, and the Batten School for Leadership and Public Policy to create the 22nd Century Scholars program, a five-week internship via Zoom for approximately 60 interns. The program is so named because these scholars will, through their work, make a lasting impact on public policy that extends into the 22nd century.

Sorensen's interns are studying crises faced by the past six Governors of Virginia, hearing from speakers who were involved in the Commonwealth's responses to those crises, preparing a memorandum and presentation highlighting best practices and effective leadership lessons to help those facing crises in the future.

In addition to studying past crises, the students are drawing parallels to crises facing Virginia and the nation today.

Students participate in daily online seminars where they learn about Virginia history and engage in leadership development exercises. They are also able to interact with key government officials.

In the first weeks of the program, speakers included the Chiefs of Staff to U.S. Senator Tim Kaine (Mike Henry) and U.S. Senator Mark Warner (Mike Harney). On the state level, they have heard from Chiefs of Staff and Deputy Chiefs of Staff to Governors Gilmore (Boyd Marcus), Warner (Bill Leighty), Kaine (Bill Leighty and Wayne Turnage), McDonnell (Martin Kent), McAuliffe (Paul Reagan and Suzette Denslow), and Northam (Clark Mercer).

We are proud of our Sorensen internship cohort: Roark Corson, Nidhi Desai, Thomas Driscoll, Martha Gallagher, McClain Moran, Alec Scicchitano, JaVori Warren, and Maggie Wells.

John W. Warner Endowed Scholarship Fund

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented significant financial challenges to nonprofit organizations and Sorensen is no different. The indefinite postponement of its annual Richmond gala has significantly affected Sorensen's revenues and budget.

One very positive development has been kicking off the funding for the newly-established John W. Warner Endowed Scholarship Fund with a \$150,000 donation from the fund's namesake, former U.S. Senator John W. Warner (R-Virginia).

Senator Warner has long sought to encourage people to consider a career in public service office which, together with military service, are the greatest service one can provide to our country. He believes the Sorensen Institute provides the education and experiences people need to be successful in building a career in public service, whether through effective community leadership or through elective and appointed office.

Warner expounded on his views about Sorensen and its bipartisan, public service mission in a two-part podcast series.


The Senator expressed his belief in the importance of working together in a bipartisan manner to develop facts, exchange opinions, and get down to the work of creating solutions on key issues that will have a profound impact on future generations.

He noted that "America has always been the land of dreams. People dream in this county and the dreamers occasionally get some things done well."

Warner praised Sorensen for "doing good not just for Virginia, but for all of America. Through a bipartisan spirit, you bring people back from the poles by closing the distance and making solutions possible."

For many, John Warner has epitomized public service. We are deeply appreciative for his service, his generous support of the Sorensen Institute, and the time he has devoted to our bipartisan programs promoting effective leadership.

For a link to the podcast, visit the Weldon Cooper Center home page: coopercenter.org.

Larry Roberts is Director of the Sorensen Institute for Political Leadership. For more information about Sorensen, go to sorenseninstitute.org. Larry Roberts can be contacted at: larry.roberts@virginia.edu 



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And then along came COVID: *Serving Veterans* By JOHN MAXWELL

When I was appointed by Governor Northam as Commissioner of the Virginia Department of Veterans Services (VDVS) in February, I looked forward to traveling throughout the state to visit our local offices and facilities, seeing our many dedicated employees, and meeting with the veterans and families we serve.

Then the COVID-19 pandemic arrived. Almost immediately, our leadership team realized we had to take strong actions to protect the health and safety of those we serve, while finding new ways to continue our mission of serving Virginia's veterans, transitioning service members, and their families. We knew that the needs of veterans and their families would not go away, and in many cases those needs were compounded because of the pandemic.

We worked closely with Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs Carlos Hopkins, the Virginia Department of Health, and many other partners to follow directives that would reduce the spread of COVID-19. We suspended in-person services at our 34 Benefits Services offices and 27 Virginia Veteran and Family Support (VVFS) program operating locations. Additionally, we followed new rules and guidelines for our veterans care centers in Richmond and Roanoke, our veterans cemeteries in Amelia, Dublin and Suffolk, and for the Virginia War Memorial in Richmond.

Our staff immediately began conducting business by email, telephone, and teleconferencing. Our care centers implemented stringent policies to prevent COVID-19 infections among their residents. Virginia's three state veteran cemeteries put in place procedures to allow us to continue to provide an honorable final resting place for our veterans and their families. The interior portion of the Virginia War Memorial had to be closed, but we ensured that family members, veterans, and citizens could still visit the Shrine of Memory to honor those brave Virginians who made the ultimate sacrifice. The Virginia War Memorial has a dual mission to honor and to educate, and the Memorial team launched an extensive online series of webinars and talks designed to keep Virginians connected to their Memorial.

I am extremely proud of how we remained determined to reach veterans. We called veterans to check on them and to create "word of mouth" communication that we were still open for business, just in a different way. We also found innovative ways to accomplish our mission. For example, we learned how to effectively put together virtual online events such as the Commonwealth's Memorial Day Ceremony, our HIRE VETS NOW job fairs and 2020 Virginia Women Veterans Summit.

More than 37,000 citizens across the Commonwealth watched the 2020 Commonwealth of Virginia Memorial Day ceremony, livestreamed from the Virginia War Memorial on social media and broadcast television—many, many more than would have been able to attend in person.

Hundreds of transitioning service members and potential employers from Virginia and around the U.S. participated in the HIRE VETS NOW virtual events, produced by our Virginia Transition Assistance Program (VTAP) team in partnership with The Virginia Chamber Foundation.

The 2020 Virginia Women Veterans Summit in June was our seventh annual event specifically targeted at our women veterans. Virginia has over 108,000 women veterans, the largest percentage per population of women veterans of any state. The 2020 Summit, held as a virtual event because of the pandemic, was an outstanding success with an amazing program featuring 91 speakers and more than 1,300 active participants watching and relaying online questions and comments.

As I write this, the Commonwealth has entered Phase Three of its reopening process. We have reopened the majority of our VDVS local offices for in-person visits by appointment. Visitors to the Virginia War Memorial are now permitted to tour the interior portions of the facility, and memorial services and funeral honors are now again offered at our state veterans cemeteries. All of our offices and facilities have policies and procedures in place to protect the health and safety of visitors and staff members.

Moving forward, we expect continued reliance on electronic communications to serve veterans and their families. Remote work will persist, for both safety and service reasons. Our operating procedures will reflect this change as we adopt a hybrid operating model combining remote operations with an in-person office environment. We also see this as an effective way to improve outreach while promoting safe infection control practices.

While COVID-19 has changed the world in which we live, the Virginia Department of Veterans Services has strengthened its commitment to meeting the needs of Virginia's veterans and families. The turmoil created by the pandemic means that veterans and their families will continue to need the programs and services provided by VDVS, perhaps now more than ever.

We will continue to find new and innovative ways to serve. We will continue to work harder every day to ensure that Virginia remains the #1 state for veterans in America. Virginia's veterans deserve nothing less.

John Maxwell was appointed Commissioner of the Virginia Department of Veterans Services in February 2020. He is a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, earned an MBA from Auburn University, and served 28 years on active duty with the U.S. Navy retiring with the rank of Captain. He can be contacted at john.maxwell@dvs.virginia.gov.



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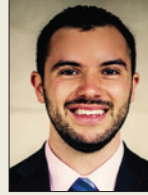
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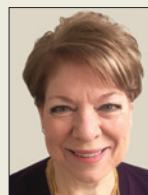
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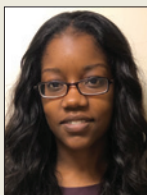
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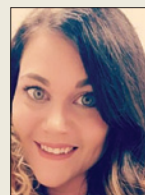
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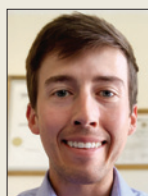
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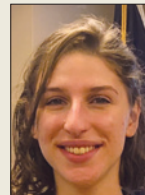
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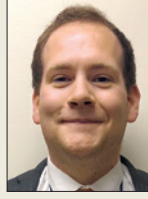
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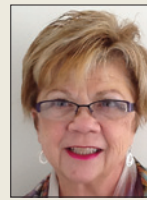
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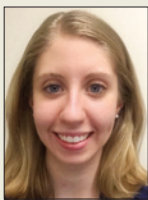
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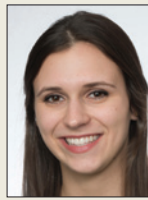
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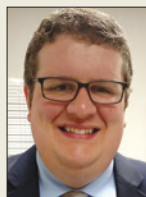
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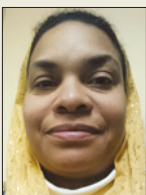
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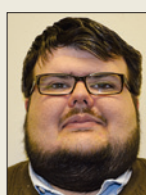
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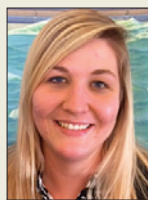


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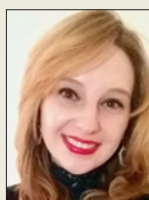
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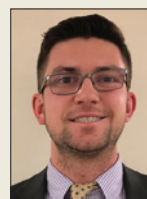
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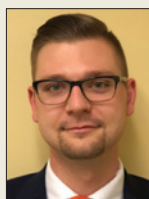
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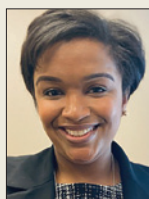
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Saxon Shoes

By KEN JESSUP

After finishing a Session of the Virginia General Assembly, which ended in a very cold month of March, my wife, Faye, arrived to help me pack up and take me home for a much-needed break. I'm legally blind, so she does the driving. Trust me, you don't want me steering about all those highways and byways.

Faye had shown up a couple days early to visit with friends. Now, there's a fairly new and very popular upscale open-air shopping center in the far outskirts of our Capital City and friends were all buzzing about the various stores. Naturally, and I know this is a sexist comment, but the discussion between women turned to shoes and how Saxon Shoe Store was so nice and the selections were so good and the salespeople were so helpful.

Saxon's is legendary in Richmond. They started as a hole-in-the-wall in a strip mall, and now they are the department store for



“
...the credit cards in
my wife's pocket were
keeping her warm...
”

shoes...and bags, and hosiery, and nail polish, and hats, and greeting cards, and.... well, you get the idea. My friend Bonnie remembers taking her toddler there decades ago for baby shoes. And, of course, who can resist the 8-inch high heels that are the feminine equivalent of “hold my beer.”

Oh, Faye's friend neglected to say the prices are so high! But you get what you pay for, and that's not the point of the story.

I'm wearing a suit; the temperature is below freezing; it's 8 a.m. and the store opens... at 10. For 2 hours I froze while we walked around the mall, looking in windows at stuff beyond our means, me with no topcoat and I can only assume the credit cards in my wife's pocketbook were keeping her warm and toasty.

When 10 a.m. arrived and the store opened I was one happy man, although a scowl was frozen on my face. My fingers and toes felt like ice in a cocktail. After a few minutes wifey was ready to leave — after not even trying on a pair of shoes!

As we headed to the car, my body dealing with its new frozen state, I informed Faye that she was still alive for one reason only — only because I could not drive!


Ken Jessup is chairman of the Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired, a member of the State Rehabilitation Council, and the Statewide Independent Living Council. ▣

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