
Virginia

Democrats face off in U.S. Senate race

The tornado-devastated city of Petersburg, Virginia was the scene of the first encounter between the contenders for the Democratic nomination for the U.S. Senate from Virginia. Appearing before a group of 30 mostly African-American Democrats from the Third Congressional District on April 9 were Virginia State Sen. Virgil Goode, incumbent Sen. Chuck Robb, and Nancy Spannaus, the LaRouche Democrat. The fourth candidate expected to file in the race, Richmond lawyer Sylvia Clute, was not present.

Unlike the last two campaigns Spannaus ran in, this race is wide open from anyone's standpoint, and the ability of the Democratic Party bureaucracy to exclude Spannaus is more limited. For the first time in nearly 20 years, the Democrats are holding an open primary, scheduled for June 14. It remains to be seen whether the constituencies of ordinary working people—still unrepresented by all but Spannaus in this race—will continue to be intimidated against working for Spannaus. Spannaus ran for Senate in 1990 and governor in 1993.

After five-minute presentations by each candidate, it didn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that Spannaus was the only one addressing the real political and economic issues. Ironically, despite the fact that Goode and Robb are machine politicians, Spannaus was also the only candidate to have filed her petitions with the state—more than double the requirement.

Spannaus began with an outline of the impending meltdown in the financial markets—a meltdown that has liquidated more than \$1 trillion in the last weeks. This collapse was projected by the only credible economist around, Lyndon LaRouche, and a tax on derivatives speculation was proposed by him to dry up the markets. Now, more than a year later, she said, Rep. Henry Gonzalez (D-Tex.) is leading the fight against the speculative excesses threatening the financial system. His efforts need to be supplemented by LaRouche's program for federalizing the Federal Reserve, and creating millions of jobs rebuilding the energy, transport, and water infrastructure of the nation.

Because of the financial collapse, it is critical as well for Democrats to mobilize to defend the presidency against Whitewatergate. The LaRouche Democrats are leading a national campaign on this, Spannaus said, because we cannot

let our country be treated like a banana republic by the British.

Goode spoke next, highlighting his personal history in the state Senate, and his longtime support for former Gov. Douglas Wilder. He noted how proud he was of Virginia's AAA bond rating, and his commitment to maintaining a balanced budget. If he gets into the U.S. Senate, he promised, he would continue the same record of budget-balancing and constituency service.

No difference?

Senator Robb then took the podium to address the group. Appearing more self-confident than usual, Robb said he would fight hard in the primary, despite the fact that the U.S. Senate would be in session. He also claimed that he would overcome one of the main problems he saw in the gubernatorial campaign of former Attorney General Mary Sue Terry last fall—lack of coordination with local Democratic committees. (Terry was defeated by Republican George Allen.)

Robb then stated baldly: If the Republican nominee is who I think it will be, "there's not even any difference between us and the Republicans on economic and foreign policy issues, or even fiscal policy (since they claim to be for balanced budgets.)" Therefore the campaign this fall, he said, will center primarily on "rights" issues—human rights, individual rights, a woman's "right to choose." I have a consistent positive record on human rights, Robb argued.

In a town like Petersburg, which has been economically devastated for years and still has not been rebuilt following a killer tornado in 1993, one would think that Democratic leaders would have reacted to Robb with outrage. But it almost appeared as though no one noticed. Virginia, after all, is the longtime home to Byrd Democrats, whose fiscal conservatism is virtually indistinguishable from that of Republicans today. It is almost taken for granted that there is not a "dime's worth of difference" on economic issues.

Ollie's follies

The Democratic fight is still being upstaged in the media, of course, by shenanigans around Oliver North, senior Sen. John Warner (R), and North's challenger James Miller. Miller had called a press conference the previous week to expose North's psychiatric history, and ended up having his own consultations with psychiatrists exposed. Many considered the blowback nearly fatal to Miller's chances to defeat North at the Republican convention on June 4.

North may find himself obliterated, however, by blowback from the Whitewatergate scandal, about which Spannaus is making new revelations. The revelations show North and his boss George Bush to have been in the center of dirty operations in Arkansas, which British scandal mongers had hoped to pin on President Clinton.