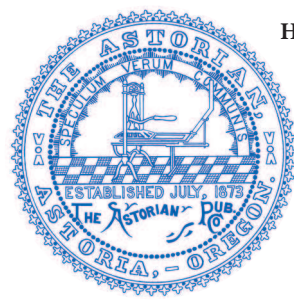


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OUR VIEW

Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian
Signs opposing a ballot measure that would have repealed the city's vacation rental rules dotted Gearhart.

Gearhart voted to preserve its unique character

By a more than 3-1 margin Tuesday, Gearhart emphatically voted in favor of a philosophy of preserving an essentially small-town residential character.

The decision tells us something about preferences for the entire North Coast in the years ahead, and sketches out a path for other seashore towns that want to accommodate some vacation rentals without making them a dominant economic theme.

Vacation rentals are an underreported battlefield in the economic revolution set off by the internet, and the opportunities it provides to bypass traditional methods to market goods and services directly to potential buyers. Unregulated, such rentals turn resort towns and some city cores into sprawling hotel or apartment complexes. Allowed to go too far, these rentals denude towns of contributing full-time citizens and replace them with short-term tenants with no real stake in the well-being of the place.

These concerns certainly underpinned the outcome in Gearhart. It is an upscale beach town, one with deep and genteel roots, a place all residents cherish. Those who favored rolling back the limits on vacation rentals in some cases simply wanted to spread the cost of an expensive home among weekenders. But those who favored keeping the restrictions recognized the costs to the community of having too many amateur innkeepers attempting to remotely operate modern-day boarding houses.

Aside from the deeper dilemma of preserving the charms of a coastal town, worries justifiably revolved around issues like inappropriate parking, partying, trash and wear-and-tear on municipal services and infrastructure. A desire to wring more value from a beach house by renting it through Airbnb and other websites is understandable, but a person's property rights do not extend to degrading an entire town.

What lessons does the Gearhart decision hold for other towns on the Pacific Northwest coast? Perhaps first and foremost, that these issues are not going away. Each community must prepare to make its own defenses and compromises.

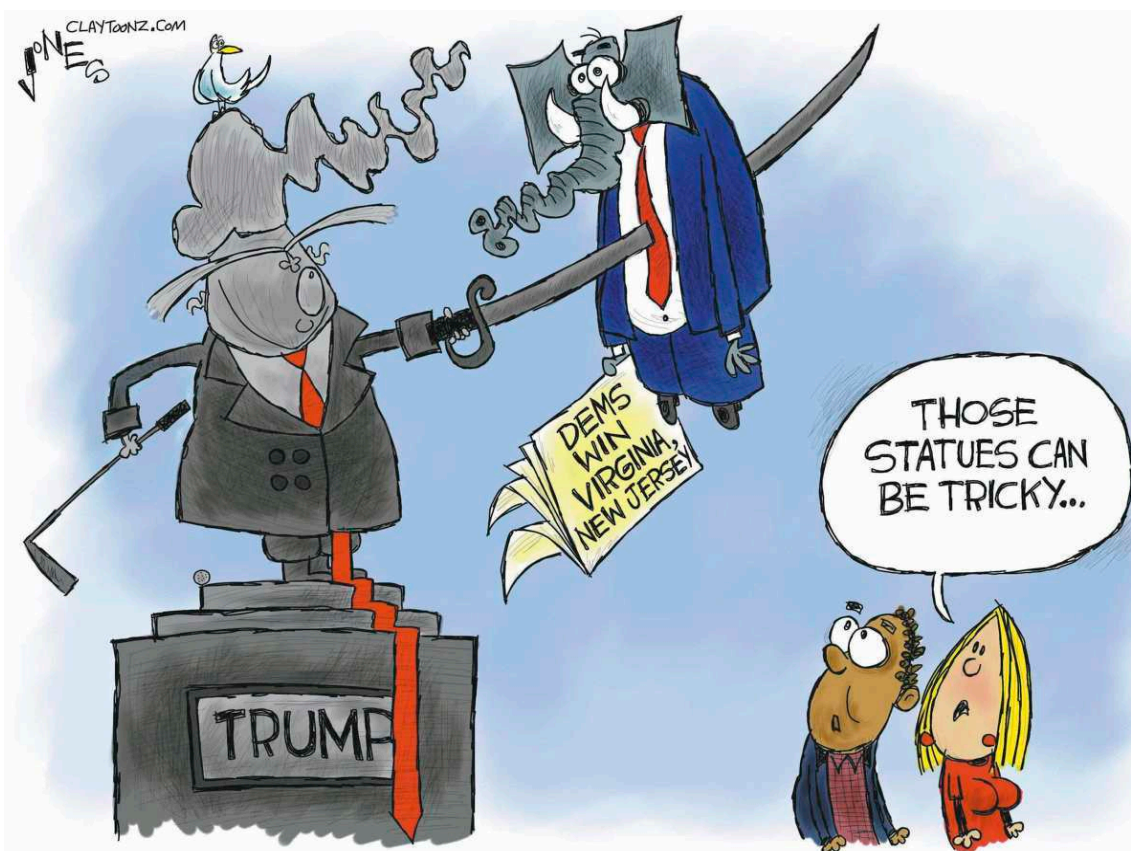
This appealing region will inevitably fill up due to the popularity of living on the coast in a growing nation. But on top of that, disasters like the California wildfires are turning more eyes this way. As the Southwest U.S. turns more arid and hot, moist and cool start to sound pretty good — both to vacationers and potential new residents. Rapid housing price escalation in nearby cities will lead some to cash out and seek peace here.

Coastal towns that don't plan for growth pressures can find themselves transformed beyond recognition, and not always in good ways.

Beyond the need for proactive municipal planning, Gearhart demonstrates the fundamental importance of an active citizenry that knows what it wants. In Gearhart's case, current town leadership largely shared citizens' views. This is not always the case. Ask questions of city council and mayoral candidates. Attend council meetings. Pay attention to the news. Don't be blindsided by incremental decisions that add up to wholesale changes in the places we live.

Now that the vote is over, Gearhart elected officials need to listen to the concerns raised by supporters of the ballot measure, and amend the rules where changes make sense. The officials have already expressed a willingness to do that. It's time to come together and work out the differences in the City Council chambers, not via ballot initiative.

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The GOP should be scared by Virginia

By FRANK BRUNI

New York Times News Service

Although at times over the last week it seemed that Democrats were doing their damndest to lose the Virginia gubernatorial race, they failed in that endeavor, which is to say that they succeeded at the polls. Ralph Northam will be the state's next governor.

That's a gigantic relief, because a Northam defeat would have prompted a Democratic meltdown — and rightly so. In statewide races, Virginia is increasingly blue: Hillary Clinton beat Donald Trump there by



5 percentage points a year ago. And Trump's ceaseless assault on propriety, decency and ethical, responsible government is supposedly firing up liberals as never before. Virginia on Tuesday was the place to demonstrate that.

The demonstration was convincing. Not only did Northam beat his Republican opponent, Ed Gillespie, by about 9 points — a margin of victory larger than either Clinton's or the 2-point advantage that ushered the state's current Democratic governor, Terry McAuliffe, into office four years ago — but Democrats also performed strongly in other Virginia races. So strongly, in fact, that one Democrat, Danica Roem, unseated a longtime Republican incumbent in the House of Delegates and will become the nation's only openly transgender state representative. The history that she made flies squarely in the face of the bigotry and divisiveness that Trump sows.

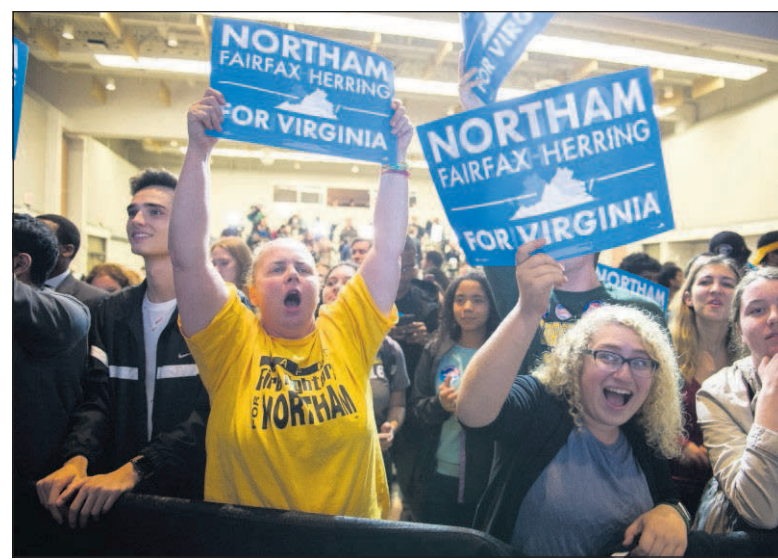
Just when we needed a sign that his America is not all of America, Virginia came to the rescue and gave us one. And I guarantee you that the Republicans up for re-election in 2018 saw it, shuddered and will spend the next weeks and months trying to figure out just how much trouble their party is in and precisely how to repair it. Democrats are exceedingly familiar with that feeling.

After special elections in Georgia, Montana and South Carolina failed to provide them with much hope that the anti-Trump forces were welling and that Americans who'd voted for him were seized by buyer's remorse, the returns in Virginia suggested that Trump antipathy is indeed real and that it is definitely animating.

"Virginia shows that in non-red states, Trump is a heavy load for Republican candidates to carry," the Democratic strategist Doug Sosnik told me late Tuesday night.

Does it mean that Democrats can wrest one chamber of Congress from Republican control in 2018? Impossible to say. Politically speaking, there are eons between now and then, and the Virginia governor's race had facets all its own. But there are reasons for Republicans to be very afraid.

One is that Northam outperformed Clinton without being a particularly energetic, forceful candidate. Through Tuesday morning and afternoon, I heard from pessimistic Democrats who were already ruing the fact that he'd been the party's nominee. Couldn't they have found someone with more fire? Someone smoother? In the race's final days, he flip-flopped on sanctuary cities and made other blunders that cast him



AP Photo/Cliff Owen

Supporters celebrate news that Democrat Ralph Northam won the Virginia gubernatorial election Tuesday.

as unsteady and uncertain. Didn't matter. He won nonetheless.

Republicans should also worry that they've oversold themselves on the moderate-progressive divide in the Democratic Party and how severely Democrats would be hobbled by it. In the days leading up to Tuesday, a book by Donna Brazile, the former head of the Democratic National Committee, reignited the enmity between Clinton's backers and supporters of Bernie Sanders, and that became one of several

The returns in Virginia suggested that Trump antipathy is indeed real and that it is definitely animating.

reasons to wonder if progressives would fail to turn out for Northam, a milquetoast moderate.

In the end, enough of them did, not just to guarantee his victory but to jeopardize Virginia Republicans' 66-34 majority in the state's House of Delegates. Democrats seemed poised late Tuesday, as the votes were still being counted, to pick up 13 seats.

"If the Virginia results showed anything, it's that ideological purity isn't necessary to win in the Age of Trump," Lis Smith, a Democratic operative who worked for McAuliffe, told me Tuesday night. "Northam came out as a two-time George W. Bush voter, and he failed some key liberal litmus tests. Still he won."

In rooting for a Gillespie victory, the GOP was looking for something larger: an assurance that a Republican in a swing state or swing district could find the right recipe for energizing Trump supporters without alienating Trump skeptics. Gillespie's answer was to keep Trump at arm's length physically but not spiritually. So while he never — not once — had Trump stump for him in Virginia, he parroted the president's tough talk about criminals and immigrants and denounced professional football players who didn't stand for the national anthem. Trump didn't cry foul during the

campaign, but he did on Twitter on Tuesday night, griping that Gillespie "worked hard but did not embrace me" and showing again that he's all too content to spar publicly with lawmakers and candidates in his own party. Republicans should be afraid for that reason as well.

Beyond the returns, this was a governor's race that made the skin crawl, which is to say that it was a sufficiently accurate mirror and microcosm of American political culture in the Age of Trump. Partisan groups and panicked candidates trafficked in overblown fears, appealed to the worst in voters and debased themselves in pursuit of their prize — reasoning, I suppose, that dignity could be recovered on the far side of ugly victory. I'm not sure that's ever wholly true.

And I'm not drawing any equivance. Northam didn't sell out his principles nearly as thoroughly as Gillespie did, and Democrats didn't sink to Republicans' level. In fact one of the most audacious tricks that Republicans sought to pull off was gaining up as much outrage over a loathsome Latino Victory Fund ad that ran on television just a handful of times — it showed a truck with a Confederate flag hunting down children of color — as there was over viciously negative commercials of Gillespie's that blanketed the airwaves. These attacks essentially branded Northam, a mild-mannered pediatrician who served in the Army, as some unhinged leftie eager to give guns to pedophiles.

Gillespie's campaign "has not been just a dog whistle to the intolerant, racially resentful parts of the Republican base; it's been a mating call," wrote The Washington Post in a blistering — and wholly warranted — editorial that noted what many other observers were also fascinated by: how radically Trump's ascendance and omnipresence changed the way Gillespie comported himself, a transformation with dark implications for the GOP and scary ones for America.

Before this race, Gillespie was as establishment as an establishment Republican could be, aligned closely with George W. Bush, who has made his distaste for Trump's viciously divisive politics clear. He typified a coolheaded, practical approach to politics. He was more tradesman than ideologue.

Until the last few months, when he utterly transformed. The impression he left on voters was an ugly one, and he and the GOP have nothing to show for it. That should scare Republicans most of all.