

Legislative Report  
May 2017  
Val Coluni

1. FREE SPEECH LEGISLATOR (CANDIDATE FOR VA GOVERNOR) vs VOTERS. "Rally to end illegal immigration." Two local restaurants cancelled the Legislators previously approved and scheduled rally at their businesses due to phone calls/e-mails from local voters and one organization who threatened to boycott their business if the rally took place as previously scheduled. The locals felt the Legislator was using divisive rhetoric to stroke controversy. ("we will hunt down illegal immigrants; showing "mug shots of three illegal immigrants who were charged (not convicted) in the death of a Lynchburg teenager) Eventually the rally was held at the county court house. Were the voters guilty of denying "free speech.?"

2. GERRYMANDERING--WHICH HELPED THE BIRTH OF A POWERFUL POLITICAL CAUCUS. Both political parties have used this tactic to their political advantage--to protect their incumbents and/or gain partisan advantage. A recent article in the Washington Post shows how this tactic significantly weakens our democracy, After the 2010 elections this party thru gerrymandering was able to withdraw districts so that it eventually contributed to the election of a most conservative Legislator and also aided others from the same party. Some of these individuals are now part of the Freedom Caucus which is now playing a major role in current federal legislative efforts in Washington! Currently there are now major law suits in the Federal Courts to revise the boundaries of these voting districts and citizen efforts to remove the decision making from the politicians.

3. FELON VOTING RIGHTS. Recently our Governor issued an executive order to restore voting rights for numerous eligible felons all at the same time. This was a deviation from past practice. Some in the Virginia Assembly protested to the Virginia Courts and the Court ruled that this was unconstitutional and the order was voided. The Court ruled that the restoration of rights must be done on a "case-by-case" basis. Our General Assembly remains somewhat divided on how we should proceed on this subject even to the point of raising the issue "should voting rights be restored at all?"

In our past petty larceny could cause you to lose the right to vote. Later, a U.S. amendment prohibited race from being used to prohibit voting rights. The issue is still a controversial one today: should convicted felons get their voting rights back?? Today 1 out of 5 African-Americans in Virginia are disenfranchised from their voting rights. Our Governor will soon inform us how he plans to proceed on this issue. Some feel that on this issue we are clinging to past traditions. Do you have any advice for the Governor? Contact your representative ASA!