

W06 – Editorial writing

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**Editorial: Bonds of trust broken, Northam must resign**

[https://www.pilotonline.com/opinion/article\\_dceef8ca-2713-11e9-8b1c-07fab9933d4d.html](https://www.pilotonline.com/opinion/article_dceef8ca-2713-11e9-8b1c-07fab9933d4d.html)

THROUGHOUT HIS campaign for governor, Ralph Northam modeled himself to the people of Virginia as someone who would be a steady, experienced hand at the helm. The adult in the room. A man you can trust.

There was ample reason to believe that narrative. His was a story of hard work and perseverance, of determination and a sincere desire to help others. From a childhood on Virginia's rural and rugged Eastern Shore, he earned his place at the Virginia Military Institute, where he served as president of the Honor Court.

Commission in the U.S. Army followed, then graduation from the Eastern Virginia Medical School, military service and time in private practice as a pediatric neurologist. He carried that breadth of experience with him when he went to Richmond, first as a state senator and then as lieutenant governor.

Steady, honest, trustworthy. That was Ralph Northam.

It may not be fair that the hard work of a lifetime should be overshadowed so quickly, that a mistake — perhaps made in jest or done at a time when such behavior may have been considered acceptable — should weigh more than so many years of good deeds.

But politics is rarely fair, and the revelations about the governor are grave.

A conservative website on Friday published a reproduction from the 1984 EVMS yearbook, the year Northam graduated. It shows several photos very clearly of the governor, and one of two unidentifiable individuals — one in blackface and the other in Ku Klux Klan robes — who appear to be at a party.

A Pilot reporter confirmed the authenticity of the yearbook and the photo. And the governor on Friday confirmed he was one of the people in that photo, though he declined to say which one.

That admission came as part of a lengthy apology issued by Northam's office following reporting about the yearbook spread that gave the story national attention. In his statement, the governor said he was

"deeply sorry for the decision I made to appear as I did in this photo" and that "this behavior is not in keeping with who I am today and the values I have fought for throughout my career ...

"I recognize that it will take time and serious effort to heal the damage this conduct has caused. I am ready to do that important work. The first step is to offer my sincerest apology and to state my absolute commitment to living up to the expectations Virginians set for me when they elected me to be their governor."

This cannot be explained as a youthful indiscretion or a childhood misstep, not that either would be sufficient for this loathsome offense.

Northam would have been 24 at the time the photo was included in the yearbook. He was already a college graduate and a member of the armed forces. He was about to finish medical school. He was no child exercising poor judgment.

Nor can Virginians simply dismiss these actions as a product of the time period, a mistake only clear through the prism of hindsight and the filter of modern standards. Yes, the commonwealth's racial history is woeful and regrettable, but wearing a KKK hood and robes wasn't defensible in 1984. Dressing in blackface should have drawn criticism at the time as well.

No, there is simply no good way to explain how or why this happened, other than to say that wearing either costume and including the photo in the yearbook were decisions made by a less experienced, less mature individual, someone who has grown and learned and listened in the decades since.

But they were made by someone who is today the governor of the commonwealth of Virginia, a man who serves a population of nearly 8.5 million people, who sets the tone for state government and who should uphold the basic values that all Virginians hold in high esteem — including tolerance, wisdom, compassion and empathy.

For years, Northam seemed to be the embodiment of those principles and deserving of the public trust.

But that license has been revoked.

Appearing in either costume animates the ghosts of the commonwealth's past, of Jim Crow and Massive Resistance and anti-miscegenation laws. For most Virginians, and especially for African Americans, it is a painful legacy better resigned to the dustbin of history.

For those Virginians, who supported Northam in his campaign for governor, the violation is too great, the injury so massive, that no apology, however sincere, can repair the damage. And on Friday evening, following the governor's statement, they said so.

The Virginia Black Legislative Caucus, the Virginia NAACP and many black lawmakers and leaders called on him to resign. These are the voices that deserve to be heard and heeded in this difficult hour for the commonwealth.

Northam, on Saturday, rejected those calls. In an unprecedented and, frankly, bizarre press conference, he admitted once dressing in blackface for a dance competition but insisted that he is not in that yearbook photo. It was about-face from Friday but probably did little to sway the judgment of Virginians as to whether he deserves the benefit of the doubt.

There is reason to believe that Northam could be an effective medium for leading a conversation about the racial divide in this state, amplifying minority perspectives and helping Virginia come to terms with his painful past.

He can do those things — but not as governor of this commonwealth.

Unfortunately, the bonds of confidence have been broken and they cannot be repaired. This Editorial Board endorsed Northam as governor to be the steady hand on the tiller, a man in whom we could trust. But we cannot anymore.

Ralph Northam must resign.

Justin Fairfax, the lieutenant governor, may not have chosen this path to the executive's office and he has daunting challenge ahead. But he proven himself to be astute leader during his time in Richmond and will be a capable replacement following Northam's departure.

May he shoulder this responsibility with skill and grace, helping the commonwealth to put this ugly episode behind it.

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### **Editorial: In Virginia Beach, a tragedy we didn't deserve**

[https://www.pilotonline.com/opinion/article\\_e7d8e90e-847d-11e9-95e1-1f1819940656.html](https://www.pilotonline.com/opinion/article_e7d8e90e-847d-11e9-95e1-1f1819940656.html)

Following the mass shooting at Virginia Tech 12 years ago, professor and poet Nikki Giovanni delivered a stirring address that included a simple truth.

"No one deserves a tragedy."

It is a mantra that bears repeating in Virginia Beach and across a commonwealth that on Friday witnessed yet another senseless act of violence.

According to law enforcement, a gunman shot one person in a car outside of a government building at the Virginia Beach Municipal Center before proceeding inside, where he fired at public workers, citizens, police — anyone who had the misfortune to be at that place and time.

Twelve people died from the gunfire. Most were city employees and residents of Virginia Beach. Many had worked in those offices for several years and, in one case, for more than four decades. Two

Chesapeake residents, one person from Norfolk, a Powhatan resident and one contractor were among those killed.

"This is the most devastating day in the history of Virginia Beach," Mayor Bobby Dyer said at a Friday news conference. "The people involved are our friends, co-workers, neighbors and colleagues."

Those killed, confirmed by police officials on Saturday morning, should be held in our hearts, our prayers and our memories. They are Laquita C. Brown, Tara Welch Gallagher, Mary Louise Gayle, Alexander Mikhail Gusev, Katherine A. Nixon, Richard H. Nettleton, Christopher Kelly Rapp, Ryan Keith Cox, Joshua A. Hardy, Michelle "Missy" Langer, Robert "Bobby" Williams and Herbert "Bert" Snelling.

Four others were injured. As of Saturday, three were in critical condition while the other was in fair condition. One of those shot was a Virginia Beach police officer who was saved by his ballistics vest. He was among the brave first responders who were on the scene quickly and, according to Beach Police Chief James Cervera, engaged the suspect in an extended gun battle.

The suspect, who was a 40-year-old who worked as for the city's public utilities department for 15 years, was shot by police and died at the scene. Investigators hope to learn what led to his decision to come to his workplace armed with a .45-caliber handgun and murder his coworkers.

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No one deserved this tragedy, certainly not the men and women whose lives were cruelly and coldly extinguished on Friday afternoon.

When the gunman stormed into Building 2, they were in the final hours of a work week, putting the finishing touches on things before heading out the door to family, friends and the open-armed promise of the weekend. They did nothing to earn their awful fate.

Neither do their loved ones deserve the future to which they have been sentenced, one of sorrow, of absence and of cherished memory. They will need the strength of the living — the love and compassion of their community, united together in support — to endure the anguish of all the days to come.

It is an awful thing that this happened anywhere and difficult to square this with the peaceful setting of the Municipal Center.

The complex nods to the community's rural history and is a world away from the bustle of the Oceanfront. The sprawling array of Colonial-style brick buildings recall a simpler time, when people could expect to go to work, or school, or church, or the theater or any number of other places without fear of a mass shooting.

And the sorrow of this senseless act is something that all of Hampton Roads will endure. It is little surprise that the victims come from communities throughout the region, as thousands of people live and work in different cities, traveling each day from one to another.

So while this happened in Virginia Beach, it is not the community's burden to bear alone. That was evident in the messages of support and sympathy that poured in from the other cities here and across the commonwealth, with offers to help in whatever way they could.

That kindness — all kindness, right now — is greatly welcomed and sorely needed.

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There are policy questions that must be asked and answered, both big and small, in the aftermath of this. These deserve a robust debate, one with ample participation from the public, aimed at making this community and this country a better, stronger and safer place to live.

This was the deadliest shooting in Virginia Beach's history and the worst in the United States this year. That distinction is unlikely to hold for long. There have been more than 150 mass shootings in 2019, and this was only the deadliest nationwide since November.

Thus, we are challenged: Either we resign ourselves to the fact that what happened in Virginia Beach on Friday, and countless other communities before it, is part of life in America. Or we commit ourselves to something different. The choice is ours to make.

Today, however, our thoughts should be centered on the lives lost, on those poised for a long recovery and for all those mourning.

"We are sad today, and we will be sad for quite a while. We are not moving on, we are embracing our mourning," Giovanni said a dozen years ago and nearly 300 miles from the Virginia Beach Municipal Center. "No one deserves a tragedy."

What was true then is true now. Together, we will heal.

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### **Editorial: Conducting manager searches in secret shows contempt for public**

<https://www.pilotonline.com/opinion/vp-ed-editorial-secret-manager-searches-20190915-r7auehhd5rcsxkjkbmlh4dlemi-story.html>

THE CHESAPEAKE CITY Council on Tuesday introduced Christopher Price, deputy executive of Prince William County in Northern Virginia, as its choice to become the community's 11th city manager.

James Baker, the manager for six years, announced in February that he would leave the post, tendering a resignation to take effect in October.

Given nearly eight months to select Baker's replacement, the council went to work. According to Pilot reporting, the city hired Illinois firm GovHR USA to conduct a national search and generated 58 applicants for the vacancy, which was advertised for about six weeks.

The firm winnowed the field to 15 names, conducting background checks and confirming references, and council members interviewed four candidates in the summer.

They concluded that Price, a former Chesapeake employee who spent four years in the planning department and who holds a master's degree in public administration from Old Dominion University, would be a good fit.

But, in doing all of that, they also decided that Chesapeake residents — the people whose lives will be affected by whoever serves as manager — shouldn't play a role in that process. With numerous opportunities to invite public participation and input, council members instead chose to keep citizens in the dark.

Chesapeake officials, who ostensibly serve the public interest, are not the first to favor secrecy over transparency when hiring a manager — indeed, Norfolk recently did something similar — but that in no way lessens the insult to citizens, who deserved better and who should be outraged by this behavior.

Hiring a city manager is arguably the most important decision an elected city council makes.

In the council-manager form of government, the manager acts as the de facto head of government — someone tasked with spinning the ideas and objectives of elected officials into policies and initiatives that can be implemented to achieve the council's goals.

In large cities such as those in Hampton Roads, the manager administrates the sprawling expanse of local government which includes thousands of municipal employees and combined annual budgets in excess of \$1 billion. And the office is handsomely rewarded for those weighty responsibilities, earning salaries that rival any in the public sector.

So when a council is tasked with hiring a new manager, it is important that the process be conducted with the seriousness and professionalism commensurate with that duty. Even better if elected officials proceed in full view of the public — soliciting input about the qualities desired in a manager, at the very least, up to and including candidate interviews in open session so that citizens can see the people vying for the position.

There are plenty of reasons why elected officials will claim this is a terrible idea, from the notion that the candidate pool would be diminished by an open process — would-be managers won't alienate their employers by allowing their candidacy to be public! — to the errant belief that working behind closed doors is the way these things are done.

The fact is an open process inspires confidence, both in the elected officials conducting it and the person ultimately selected through it. By inviting the public to participate, it helps strengthen the connection between people and their government — and it helps a new manager get off on the right foot, since he or she is a known quantity from Day One.

In Chesapeake, officials decided that secrecy was the best policy, which is why news that the council had hired a new manager came as such a surprise.

Asked by The Pilot about it, a city spokesman said he was “not aware of the council publicizing the search process for a new manager.” Translation: This was a deliberate choice.

As noted earlier, Norfolk embraced a similar approach — that involved stiff-arming the public — this summer after the Board of Directors of the Hampton Roads Economic Development Alliance selected City Manager Doug Smith to be the organization's new president and CEO.

Mayor Kenny Alexander told a Pilot reporter that the city would need to undertake a full search to identify Smith’s replacement, only for the council to turn around a few weeks later to announce it had tapped Larry "Chip" Filer, associate vice president for entrepreneurship and economic development at ODU, to take the job.

None of this to say that Price in Chesapeake or Filer in Norfolk is the wrong choice for these influential jobs. Both arrive with considerable experience and ties to the area, and obviously the elected officials who serve those communities were suitably impressed to extend job offers, knowing the peril they will face should the hire not work out.

But both cities would have put these men in more advantageous positions — and perhaps strengthened the relationship between city hall and the public — by conducting the process in a more open manner and inviting citizens to be full participants in the process.

And it’s worth noting as another Hampton Roads community begins its search for a new manager.

Dave Hansen’s unexpected resignation in Virginia Beach rendered vacant one of the most attractive and challenging public sector jobs in the commonwealth. Sure, building consensus in that community can be daunting — as winning agreement from a majority on council also can be — but there is ample opportunity to do great things at the Beach.

Council members can do well for that community by not making the missteps of their peers in neighboring cities but instead committing to a process that proceeds in a thoughtful, deliberate and transparent fashion until the right candidate is found.

No community should have to see such an important decision made hastily or in secret. Better that the public come together and use that opportunity to have a serious decision about what type of community they aspire to build and then find the person who can help deliver it.

For that, openness is essential — assuming Beach officials are courageous enough to demand it.