

Schapiro: The Republican who built Democratic Northern Virginia

As a kid in the 1930s, John “Til” Hazel would play in a creek that trickled through his home county, Arlington, to the Potomac River, on the opposite bank of which stood the seat of the federal government whose growth and largess would help transform then-sleepy, still-rural Northern Virginia into a suburban dynamo.

With undergraduate and law degrees from Harvard, Hazel returned to Northern Virginia in the 1950s, recognizing that its proximity to Washington, D.C., was a virtual guarantee for amassing a fortune in land and construction. And he would — after giving up his land-use law practice to do as clients were: buying and developing real estate.

By the 1970s, John Tilghman Hazel Jr. — prosperous and politically influential — teamed with others in the region’s business class to win a state university for Northern Virginia. Fifty years ago next month, [George Mason University](#) — initially an arm of the University of Virginia — became a free-standing four-year institution.

It is now the state’s largest public university, with nearly 40,000 students. George Mason’s law school in Arlington is housed in a building named for Hazel, who died March 15 at age 91 at his farm in Fauquier County, a leafy, hilly quilt of farms and small towns increasingly beset by the development forces Hazel et. al unleashed decades earlier — occasionally to the ire of those weary of its consequences: traffic, density, high prices.

Near the law school is an enormous hole in which a 360,000 square-foot building is going up. It will be home to the GMU School of Computing. That project, financed with public and

private dollars, complements a much sought-after get for the state: Info-tech giant Amazon's East Coast headquarters in Northern Virginia, announced in 2018.

The School of Computing will straddle, in part, an enclosed, subterranean concrete culvert through which runs the creek that had been Hazel's playground as a little boy. It is perhaps a reminder of how Northern Virginia shaped Hazel and how he shaped the region — by flowing continuously through, and seeping deeply into, the many facets of Northern Virginia life, most notably, its economy, schools and vexing transportation problems.

Hazel, with his signature crew cut, bulldog mien and plain-spokenness, was among the last of a generation of Northern Virginia power brokers whose vocabulary did not include the word "no." Their ranks read like a big-league lineup: Hazel's partner, Milt Peterson; Earle Williams, Dan Clemente, Gerald Halpin, Mike Erkiletian, Bill Thomas, Dan Bannister, Dwight Schar, Joe Cecchi, John Touns, George Johnson, Stan Harrison, and Sid Dewberry.

White, male and disproportionately Republican, they became very rich — as developers, federal contractors, architects, lawyers and home -, office- and road builders — and pressed, unapologetically, for education, transportation and cultural improvements, arguing they were essential to a strong economy, which, in turn, would draw the best and brightest to the Washington suburbs.

The Washington Post estimated that, at one point, one in 10 residents of Fairfax County lived in Hazel-built houses. Hazel did the lawyering for what became Tysons Corner, a now clogged edge city. He also built office parks. Even his occasional failures could be lucrative.

He and Peterson spent \$11 million on land in Prince William County for a vast mixed-use project opposed by historic preservationist for encroaching on a Manassas Civil War battlefield. The federal government intervened, absorbing the tract as park land and paying Hazel and Peterson \$81 million. Most of that cash was spent stabilizing their company ahead of the recession of the early 1990s.

Northern Virginia's growth — spreading from the counties of Arlington and Fairfax to Loudoun and Prince William, and beyond — had remarkable consequences. Fairfax and Prince William would become, respectively, the largest and second-largest localities in Virginia and are home to about 15% of the state's population. Both are majority non-white.

Loudoun — like Virginia as a whole, 42% non-white — is the wealthiest county in the nation, with a median household income approaching \$143,000 and a cost of living that exceeds the U.S. average by more than 12%, according to federal data. Three other Virginia counties are in the top 10 for wealth: Fairfax, Prince William and the next frontier for Washington-induced suburbanization — Stafford.

A flood of non-natives and accelerating diversity would also reinvent Northern Virginia, which not long ago favored commonsense Republicanism, as a bulwark of progressive Democratic politics.

This change is reflected in the region's new leadership class. It includes a few protégés of the old guard but as well women, Black, Hispanic and Asian professionals and the leaders of businesses that, unlike many in Northern Virginia, may not be as closely associated with federal beneficence: hospital groups, cyber-security firms and investment companies.

There is no doubt that when Hazel and his *confreres* were feeling their oats in the 1970s, they were viewed as high-handed and uncompromising. Hazel battled with the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors over restrictions on growth in nearly a dozen lawsuits that went all the way to the Virginia Supreme Court — and all of which he won.

Occasional bursts of perceived contempt by NoVa for RoVa — the Rest of Virginia — could complicate relations with the conservative grandees of the General Assembly. The late George Johnson, a Hazel ally and long-serving president of George Mason, may have been joking when he said that Virginia, if measured by SAT scores, was the equivalent of Mississippi or Arkansas when peeling away high-performing Northern Virginia.

Hazel understood that for Northern Virginia to prevail in Richmond, Northern Virginia had to be *simpatico* with other areas of the state.

His Republican pedigree, notwithstanding, Hazel was front and center in pushing for Democratic Gov. Jerry Baliles' road-financing initiative in 1986, which went unmatched for 30 years. Hazel would travel to remote, impoverished Southwest Virginia to counsel the region on ways to wean itself from coal. Hazel enlisted corporate leaders in Roanoke, Norfolk and Richmond to plump for the shared agenda of higher education and big business.

That rubbed a Republican governor, George Allen, the wrong way in the early 1990s.

Steamed that Hazel, through shoe-leather advocacy of legislators, had convinced Republicans and Democrats to defy Allen's proposed cuts in college and university budgets, the administration suggested the developer had violating

state ethics laws by not registering as a lobbyist. There apparently were faint threats of legal action, should Hazel refuse to register.

Hazel ignored the Allen administration, but not before lining up a lawyer or two — just in case. Allen’s staff seemingly struck again, using fresh appointments to the George Mason governing board to narrowly block the election of Hazel’s lobbyist-conservationist son, Jimmy, as rector, or chairman. Three decades later, Jimmy Hazel — as his father was — is GMU’s rector.

Property isn’t the only Hazel family business. Politics is, too.

-

Schapiro: Cause marketing targets worries over gun violence

Mark Smith has credible *2A bona fides*: He owns several Smith & Wesson 9 mm semiautomatic pistols. Every three months or so, he’s at the range, squeezing off several clips and truing up his aim. He’s taken gun-safety classes and has a concealed-carry permit. For Smith, firearms are about security.

“I’m protecting myself, protecting my team, protecting my customers,” said Smith, the owner of a five-branch franchise of Midas automobile repair shops in Richmond and its suburbs. That includes the global chain’s highest-grossing outlet, in westernmost Henrico County, with just under \$5 million in annual sales.

His support of gun rights, notwithstanding, Smith worries firearms are falling into the wrong hands. Alarmed by deadly mass shootings across the country and continuing gun violence in the Richmond area, Smith — through his latest signature commercial combining policy and personality — wants his customers to do something about it.

In a 30-second television advertisement - a 60-second version runs on radio - Smith urges a three-day waiting period for gun purchases, paired with more thorough background checks. He also calls for public pressure on Congress and the Virginia legislature to adopt tougher restrictions on firearms.

This is new ground for Smith. He has long practiced what is known as cause marketing. That is, elevating the profile of his business — and, ideally, its profitability — by tying it, for a broad audience, to public concerns and organizations that focus on them. For Smith, that includes blood services and regional and local feeding programs.

But in choosing to speak out on firearms, given the fury of the gun debate, Smith risked trouble. Some friends worried for his safety. In Virginia, where there were mass shootings in 2007 and 2019 and where polls show strong support for gun control, a shrill political fight continues over how access to firearms should be managed, if at all.

During their brief total control of Virginia government, Democrats won restrictions successfully resisted for years by Republicans. But with a GOP governor and his party within a single seat of taking back the General Assembly, Republicans make no secret of again minimizing limits on firearms.

And though Smith, in his commercial, urges relatively modest restrictions, that he is doing so in a region with more than

550,000 television households — Richmond is the nation's 56th-largest broadcast market — means he can quickly generate kitchen-table chatter, some of it unwanted, on a provocative subject.

"It was not an un-thoughtful move," said Mike Guld, the Raleigh, N.C., advertising and marketing consultant who has produced Smith's commercials from the start more than 20 years ago. "This was a potentially contentious subject that we did not know whether ... we should play or not."

Not one to rely on data-driven market surveys, Smith followed his instincts. This son of an automobile industry executive and effusive fan of Herman Melville's "Moby Dick" who has voted for both Democrats and Republicans, Smith said he pondered several days before deciding to go with the advertisement, which now having run several weeks, has been largely well-received.

At least that's what anecdotal evidence shows.

Sharing a favorable comment Thursday that a customer posted on his LinkedIn page, Smith estimates that he's heard — by phone, social media and in-person — from about 125 customers; that all but 12 approved of the commercial. Two told Smith to take it down, underscoring their distaste for it with a four-letter expletive.

And a solitary protester stood outside Smith's shop on Broad Street, just west of the Richmond-Henrico line, holding a sign that urged performing an unnatural act on President Joseph Biden.

In the TV spot, the barrel-chested, bearded, bespectacled Smith — speaking to camera, much as he does in person:

quickly, purposefully, *allegro* — says, “There comes a time to talk about things other than car care. That time is now.

“Gun violence — this is out of control. Texas, Buffalo, Southern California — these other shootings. These kids are under 21 and they have access to guns they shouldn’t have access to.”

Smith continues, “This is our community. We need to take care of it. Nothing changes until something changes. We need to be that change.”

About five seconds into the commercial, a streamer appears that — in black and red capital letters against a yellow field, reads, “I SUPPORT THE SECOND AMENDMENT AND OWN GUNS. I AM ADVOCATING FOR RESPONSIBLE AND ACCOUNTABLE GUN OWNERSHIP.”

As cause marketing that is character-driven, Smith’s *shtick* sticks out. It’s creating allies and adversaries.

Bill Hamby, who, with 35 years in television and public relations, has handled such disputed projects as the failed Walt Disney history theme park for Northern Virginia, commended the Smith commercial as “admirable” and “brave”; that it works because Smith — he shuns scripts, by the way — comes across as “likeable, believable, credible” everyman.

To Philip Van Cleave, the tireless lobbyist for the pro-gun Virginia Citizens Defense League, Smith is stepping over a line, alienating customers — actual and prospective — at the expense of others: “Businesses should try to be neutral. ... They don’t want to cut out customer base in either direction.”

Van Cleave says he’ll suggest his members boycott Smith’s repair shops. Also, Van Cleave said, this could mean trouble

for Midas at the corporate level should word of Smith's advocacy spread beyond Virginia. At week's end, Midas didn't seem concerned, saying Smith's views are his own.

"Midas recognizes its franchisees have the right of free speech and may communicate their opinions publicly," said Midas' Jonelle Compiani. "The opinion Mr. Smith expressed is his. It does not mean his views and opinions are expressed by Midas, constitute or imply an endorsement by Midas, or necessarily state or reflect those of Midas."

That people are talking about the commercial — perhaps it's more accurately described as an advertorial — is mission-accomplished for Smith.

He's not only keeping it on the air, he's planning to update it.

-

Schapiro: Old problem for new governor - the distraction of ambition

On Wednesday evening, favor-seeking business people, lobbyists and activists, having stroked checks for four and five figures to Glenn [Youngkin's political action committee](#), streamed into the former [Tredegar Iron Works](#) — once the Foundry of the Confederacy — for up-close-and-personal time with a newbie governor eyeing another job: the presidency.

Because in fundraising, those who give more get more, there was for higher-dollar donors a reception within the reception. Youngkin, in a dark suit rather than trademark fleece vest, worked the VIP soiree — it followed his let-them-eat-cake rally for state employees — while a singer, backed by a high-end boom box, crooned Frank Sinatra tunes. Among them: ["My Way."](#)

How appropriate.

Seven months into his nonrenewable, four-year term as governor, Youngkin — a Republican with no previous experience in politics and policy whose supposedly improbable victory in Democratic-trending Virginia has handicappers touting him for 2024 as Donald Trump without the baggage — happily feeds speculation he will be a candidate in the coming presidential cycle.

For which we ink-stained types say thank you, governor. It gives us more to write about.

Youngkin isn't the first governor since Virginia entered the competitive era just over a half-century ago to consider, seek or encourage chatter for the White House. In 1969, Linwood Holton became the state's first Republican governor of the 20th century. That alone made Holton a national prospect. And in 1973, when Richard Nixon needed a new vice president after Spiro Agnew quit in disgrace, rumors of a Holton appointment were hot and heavy.

Of 14 governors elected in Virginia since 1969 — seven Democrats and seven Republicans — all but three plunged into or were caught up in the whirl of presidential politics. The three who swore off national office were, by their own hand and the arc of events, consequential governors whose legacies endure in initiatives many Virginians might take for granted.

But it was one of those three, an emblem of the state's rural, segregationist past, who rose above it. He framed for Virginians — in terms that might seem provincial, if not haughty — the importance of the governorship as an epicenter of power and the public's expectation that its occupant will give it his all, focusing on the full-time

obligations and fleeting opportunities of a one-and-you're-done term.

It has been, ever since, a lesson for governors — one Youngkin would be wise to learn.

Two of those governors were Democrats: Jerry Baliles, in office from 1986 until 1990, shepherded advances in economic development, education and a program with which he is synonymous: transportation. The other was Ralph Northam, who preceded Youngkin and not only survived the blackface calamity but, in many respects, was strengthened by it. Health care, gun control, renewable energy, the environment and, of course, racial equity were themes of his administration.

The third was a Democrat who became a Republican and was elected governor as both: Mills Godwin Jr.

His first term, as a Democrat, was 1966 to 1970 and marked by stunning progress. This included the modernization of the state's finances, most notably the adoption of the sales tax and full embrace of bond-financing. His second, as a Republican, was 1974 to 1978. It was about retrenchment, making up for environmental neglect and, post-Watergate, confronting voter cynicism. That Godwin was twice elected by a vote of the people is a feat unmatched in the state's history.

So, too, is the eloquence with which Godwin, in a voice that made a grocery list sound important, described the office he would hold, over non-consecutive terms, for eight years: "There is no higher honor within the gift of the people of this commonwealth."

Virginians, even in a complex, multihued, suburban state the seeds of which were sprouting during Godwin's first term, don't begrudge a governor's ambition. They do expect a governor to harness that ambition in their behalf. It's when a governor puts himself ahead of the people — or is perceived as doing so — that problems begin. This is where and why Youngkin, already handicapped as a virgin to Virginia government suspicious of those who've mastered it, is skirting trouble.

Youngkin's presidential strip tease plays into Democrats' predictable narrative that he is a naive, partisan, part-time governor. It's among Republicans that the risks are greater; that Youngkin is seen as disloyal to Trump, who for all his toxicity, remains the titular head of the GOP and to whom the governor — if only because his viability as a unknown plutocrat on whom a dispirited party gambled all — swore obeisance.

There is an institutional peril, too, for Youngkin. Legislators — Democrats and Republicans — whose consent determines whether his proposals fly or flop, will become resentful of Youngkin. And not just because they'll receive less ego-stroking from a governor nursing Potomac Fever. It's because Virginia's calendar is already working against Youngkin.

There's an election next year to determine control of the House of Delegates and the Virginia Senate. Even if Republicans come out of 2023 controlling both — they now hold the House; the Senate's barely Democratic — they will immediately focus on 2025, when they'll defend their House seats on a ticket led by someone other than Youngkin. Senators, elected for four years, can immediately ignore Youngkin because their terms extend beyond his.

Doug Wilder managed to anger the public and the politicians by running for president in 1992. He says it's the worst mistake he made as governor. Maybe the bigger mistake was made by voters and legislators in trusting Wilder to fulfill his oath in Richmond.

And Youngkin should know — as a guy who's not exactly wildly popular, according to polls — that he can't afford to tick off too many people.

What's that line from "My Way"?

"There were times I'm sure you knew — when I bit off more than I could chew."