

INSIDENOVA

PRINCE WILLIAM

Prince William Today

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**BRUCE POTTER**

PUBLISHER

bpotter@insidenova.com 571-333-1538

**TREVOR BARATKO**

EDITOR

tbaratko@insidenova.com

**KARI PUGH**

DIGITAL EDITOR

karipugh@insidenova.com

**DAVE FAWCETT**

SPORTS EDITOR

dfawcett@insidenova.com

**REPORTERS**

**BEN PETERS**

bpeters@insidenova.com

EMILY SEYMOUR

eseymour@insidenova.com

CAMERON DELEAN

cdelean@insidenova.com

GRACE SCHUMACHER

gschumacher@fauquignow.com

**KEVIN SULLIVAN**

REGIONAL CIRCULATION DIRECTOR

ksullivan@insidenova.com

571-309-1684

**CONNIE FIELDS**

ADVERTISING

cfields@insidenova.com

703-303-8713

**CLASSIFIED ADS**

703-771-8831

tfields@insidenova.com

**NICKY MARSHOK**

REGIONAL PRODUCTION DIRECTOR

nmarshok@insidenova.com

Main phone: 703-318-1386

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**MEMBER:**



# You, too, can run for Congress

Another day, another candidate. That seems to have been the routine since the November election as just about every local politician has thrown their name in the hat for the open Congressional seats in the 7th and 10th districts in the 2024 elections.

The onslaught of announcements from candidates who just finished a campaign – and in at least two cases a losing campaign – is quite overwhelming. One wonders what their supporters think – they just donated money or volunteered their time to help their candidate get elected to the General Assembly, for example, only to see them turn around and announce a run for a higher office – before even being sworn into the office they just won.

Nevertheless, there are now no fewer than 13 candidates – yes, 13! – for the 10th District, which includes the cities of Manassas and Manassas Park and western Prince William County. That seat is being vacated by Democratic Rep. Jennifer Wexton, who is retiring for health reasons.

And there are at least eight announced candidates for the 7th District, which includes eastern Prince William. That seat is being vacated by Democratic Rep. Abigail Spanberger, who plans to run for governor in 2025.

Planning a campaign can be time-consuming, and, as noted, most of these candidates were just elected to another job. So to help any other would-be Congressional candidates, I asked ChatGPT to draft a campaign announcement. Simply cut and paste the announcement, fill in the appropriate details, and email it to us. Here it is:

\* \* \*

[Your Name] a dedicated and passionate [Party Affiliation] leader, officially announces their candidacy for the United States Congress, representing the [Numerical] Congressional District of Northern Virginia.

With a deep commitment to public service and a proven track record of community involvement, [Your Name] brings a fresh perspective and a strong voice to the political arena. As a resident of Northern Virginia for [Number] years, [Your Name]

understands the unique challenges and opportunities facing our community and is determined to be a tireless advocate for the people of the [Numerical] District.

Key points of [Your Name]’s candidacy include:

**1. Community Engagement:** [Your Name] has a history of active community involvement, having [briefly describe community activities and achievements].

**2. Policy Priorities:** [Highlight the key issues and policies you will focus on during your campaign. Examples may include education, healthcare, infrastructure, economic development, etc.]

**3. Proven Leadership:** [Provide examples of your leadership experience and how it has prepared you for the responsibilities of a congressional role.]

**4. Commitment to Bipartisanship:** [Express your commitment to working across party lines for the betterment of the community and the nation.]

**5. Accessible Representation:** [Share your commitment to being accessible to constituents and actively seeking their input on important matters.]

[Your Name] invites residents of the [Numerical] Congressional District to join the campaign and be part of a movement for positive change. Together, we can build a stronger, more vibrant community that represents the values and aspirations of Northern Virginia.

\* \* \*

Oh, when you send us the announcement, please include a high-resolution photo of you either standing in front of an American flag or interacting with a highly diverse group of random people.

You’re welcome.

*Bruce Potter is publisher of InsideNoVa and can be reached at bpotter@insidenova.com. He lives in the 10th District and after thoughtful consideration decided not to run for Congress next year. But his newly elected representatives in both the House of Delegates and the state Senate are among the announced candidates.*



BRUCE POTTER

## READERS REACT

### DATA CENTERS COULD HAVE DEVASTATING IMPACTS

Land-use decisions are made on a county-by-county basis in Virginia. But data centers, when sited next to residential communities, schools and parks have devastating impacts to the quality of life and financial security of people who are being ignored in land-use decisions in Prince William County.

Data centers also have state, regional and worldwide impacts to air quality, water and the environment.

It is well past time to start considering the total cost of these impacts, to stop giving tax breaks and rubber stamp approval to the data center industry. It is time to look at not only the revenue from data centers, but also the costs that can be quantified for infrastructure, for sustainable power and water – all to be borne by taxpayers and ratepayers.

How does one measure the cost of quality of life to communities, the quality of education to children, the health effects to all from living through 10 to 20 years of industrial construction literally in your neighborhood?

So, as we in Gainesville and Bristow prepare to receive the brunt of Ann

Wexton’s revenge agenda in the form of a predicted 10 to 20 years of non-stop construction for Devlin Tech Park and the PV Digital Gateway, with no financial compensation for the reduction in our quality of life, our property values and probably our health, the world’s richest corporations only get richer.

QTS’ valuation doubled in two years and is expected to double again, while residents pay the tab.

– Paula Daly  
Gainesville

### WE’RE GOING TO BE COOKED ‘LIKE A POT OF LOBSTERS’

Silver Leaf Estates and Amberleigh Station, if not the whole Linton-Devlin corridor, will almost inevitably become a heat dome. Lame-duck land-use decisions based in civil oligarchy, not representative democracy, are going to cook those citizens like a pot of lobsters.

All the heat from all those servers as well as all that impervious surface from that massive and incredibly dense industrial park will be trapped by the 80-foot buildings that tower over those neighborhoods.

When temperatures don’t drop, espe-

cially at night, bodies stop being able to sweat to cool, and in 10 minutes body temperature becomes “incompatible with human life.” In 2021, a six-day heat dome in Canada killed over 800 people.

Throughout our water basin, groundwater has been at emergency levels for months, and often surface water and streamflow are as well. Read the DEQ 2020 State Water Resources Plan to see the shocking levels of unmet demand and drought severity in the likely dry scenario. Then imagine living in a heat dome.

Why are we about to add 37 more data centers to this groundwater-less, heat-stricken equation? Washington is already in the top 10 heat islands in the country. Are we going for the whole region?

The coming Board of County Supervisors will be 4-4 on data centers with the only countywide-elected official advocating for a far more deliberate and regulated approach. Enough with belittling Deshundra Jefferson’s hard-won victory because the people who cared the most showed up to vote. That’s how democracy works. Let her lead. It could save lives.

– Bridget Bell  
Gainesville

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**REPORTERS**

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bpeters@insidenova.com

EMILY SEYMOUR

eseymour@insidenova.com

CAMERON DELEAN

cdelean@insidenova.com

GRACE SCHUMACHER

gschumacher@fauquiernow.com

**KEVIN SULLIVAN**

REGIONAL CIRCULATION DIRECTOR

ksullivan@insidenova.com

571-309-1684

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ADVERTISING

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**NICKY MARSHOK**

REGIONAL PRODUCTION DIRECTOR

nmarshok@insidenova.com

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**MEMBER:**



# Sanity on the horizon? Let's hope so

As one of the moderators, I had a front-row seat for last month's Prince William Chamber of Commerce debate between Board of County Supervisors at-large chair candidates Deshundra Jefferson and Jeanine Lawson.

While the debate was heated – and at times confrontational and even uncomfortable – what struck me the most was both candidates' professionalism, poise and passion for our community. This was epitomized when the candidates were asked to say one nice thing about their opponent.

Jefferson, the Democrat, praised Lawson for what she said she had heard was Lawson's outstanding constituent service during her years as Brentsville District supervisor. And Lawson, the Republican, said the best thing about Jefferson was that she defeated incumbent Board Chair Ann Wheeler in the Democratic primary.

Lawson no doubt was less happy about Tuesday night's results, as Jefferson defeated her in the general election, but in a Democratic-leaning county, that wasn't a big surprise. And if Lawson truly wants to help the county, she will put her disappointment aside and accept Jefferson's invitation to meet and work together.

For Jefferson, her hardest work is ahead. She is still a newcomer to local politics. She will take over a board that has been splintered along party lines. Wheeler's term was marked by Democrats using their 5-3 majority time and time again to push through initiatives and projects over fierce Republican objections – at times appearing to even ignore citizen input.

Four of those five Democrats will be back on the board for the next four years, and they will still be in the majority. When

Jefferson takes the helm in January, the board will be coming off its most contentious decision perhaps in county history if it goes through with plans to vote on the PW Digital Gateway rezonings next month. Jefferson has said she will listen to all stakeholders – Prince William voters will be watching to be sure she keeps her word.

She can start by following through on her pledge to put a hold on all data center rezonings – as much as legally possible – until the county can complete what should be a comprehensive and holistic review of data centers and all their impacts. Tuesday's outcome was not a repudiation of data centers – but nor was it an endorsement of them.

Data centers have their benefits and their drawbacks. County professionals and politicians – with feedback from the public – need time to determine where it makes the most sense to build them, how their impacts – from environmental to aesthetic – can be mitigated, and how they should be taxed to ensure the county is receiving maximum value to reduce the burden on residential taxpayers.

That work will require a detailed focus, it will require attention, and it will require a leader with the ability to put aside politics, get beyond the NIMBY-ism (Not In My Backyard), and listen to all stakeholders – not just those with big pockets and five-figure campaign contributions.

Time will tell whether Deshundra Jefferson can be that leader. But if she accomplishes nothing else, bringing some sanity to the data center debate will make her term a success.

*Bruce Potter is publisher of InsideNoVa. He can be reached at bpotter@insidenova.com.*



BRUCE POTTER

## READERS REACT

### DATA CENTERS HELP COUNTY SHIFT TAX BURDEN

Data center opponents often focus on preserving the Rural Crescent and/or building affordable housing as a better alternative.

Prince William County's Rural Crescent by its very nature is an elitist idea where a small oligarchy tells others what they can do with their land. Keeping a rural landscape is the purpose of the rural area by blocking development in 80,000-plus acres.

A freedom-loving approach would be through implementation of conservation easements. Nearby counties have maintained a rural appearance by encouraging conservation easements. Clark County is at nearly 70%, Fauquier is at 50% and Loudoun at 25%.

In Prince William, only 550 of the 222,700 acres are in easements. The landowners have spoken. They're not interested in giving up their development rights in the interest of rural appeal.

Affordable housing has been offered as an alternative to data centers, but when you look closer, it's a bad idea. Data centers consume about 8% in county services from every tax dollar contributed, leaving 92 cents for other purposes. Residen-

t units break even at about \$500,000 assessed value. Those units under that are revenue negative and must be subsidized by every other residence, even those that are revenue negative.

The key is to balance this with high revenue positive ventures like data centers and other commercial property. If the Prince William Board of County Supervisors were to make it a priority the county could very quickly move its anemic 85%/15% residential/commercial base to healthier territory like Arlington's 60/40 or Fairfax's 65/35, thereby easing the pressure on the residential taxpayer.

– Tom Whitmore  
Manassas

### WAS BOARD'S ACTION ON SUSTAINABILITY HYPOCRITICAL?

Planning Commission staff recently recommended that the Board of County Supervisors deny three rezoning requests by QTS and Compass on the Pageland data center jungle in Gainesville.

The question remains: Will Democrats on the board reject the data centers or will they move forward despite the potential damage to the environment, our national battlefield and our ecosystem?

I think most Prince William residents

know the answer to this question.

The reputations of Ann Wheeler, Victor Angry, Andrea Bailey, Margaret Franklin and Kenny Boddye are at stake.

Will they vote no, supporting their most recent vote to adopt the community energy and sustainability plan, with a price tag of \$862 million by 2050, or will they move forward? These two votes stand at opposite ends of the environmental spectrum, and the citizens of Prince William are waiting with baited breath to see which way they go.

Common sense tells us a vote for data centers – despite the damage to our environment – will confirm either that corruption has taken over our county government or that the Democrats on the board have no common sense.

As a 25-year citizen of Prince William, I expect a full accounting of the decisions this board makes in December and an explanation for their lack of concern with the county's environment after voting in favor of a \$862 million tax burden regarding our environment. The expected contradiction in votes will show county residents whether corruption has taken over our county government.

– Leigh Bravo  
Gainesville

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bpotter@insidenova.com 571-333-1538

**TREVOR BARATKO**

EDITOR

tbaratko@insidenova.com

**KARI PUGH**

DIGITAL EDITOR

karipugh@insidenova.com

**DAVE FAWCETT**

SPORTS EDITOR

dfawcett@insidenova.com

**REPORTERS**

NOLAN STOUT

nstout@insidenova.com

JARED FORETEK

jforetek@insidenova.com

JAMES JARVIS

jjarvis@insidenova.com

ACACIA JAMES

ajames@insidenova.com

CAMERON DELEAN

cdelean@insidenova.com

**KEVIN SULLIVAN**

REGIONAL CIRCULATION DIRECTOR

ksullivan@insidenova.com

571-309-1684

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nmarshok@insidenova.com

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**MEMBER:**



# One decade down, many more to go

Ten years ago this week, the first edition of Prince William County's newest newspaper rolled off the presses.

At the time we called it Prince William Today, and that first issue printed just 11 days after the closure of the county's daily newspaper, the News & Messenger (formerly the Potomac News and Manassas Journal Messenger). We had a small team, only a handful of advertisers willing to take a chance on a start-up and no office (which seemed more significant then than it does today).

But we had a belief – a belief that this community deserved and would support its own countywide newspaper, a belief that we could cover local issues, people and events in a way that would attract readers, and a belief that quality local media outlets strengthen the communities they serve.

Since we launched that paper – this paper – a decade ago, we've had plenty of challenges (not to mention a pandemic). We've actually had three different offices. But thanks to our hard-working staff – four members of which have been with us since that first edition – and the support of our readers and advertisers, InsideNoVa is now one of the top local news organizations in the state.

Twice, we've received the Virginia Press Association's sweepstakes award for weekly newspapers in our circulation category, and in 2021, we earned the VPA's top honor for community service and journalistic integrity. Last year, we were recognized by a national trade magazine, Editor & Publisher, with an honorable mention in "10 News Publishers that Do It Right."

The awards and honors are nice, but what I'm most proud of is our service to and support of this community. Our news team has provided in-depth coverage of every major issue affecting our county, from battles over immigration to debates over data

centers. Dave Fawcett, our veteran sports editor, has spotlighted the accomplishments of literally hundreds of local athletes. And over the past two years, we've added weekly coverage of the local military community and monthly pages that feature "Amazing Kids." All of this is content that, for the most part, can't be found elsewhere.

We picked up three major community initiatives: Hoops Fest, which, sadly, ended last year, but raised over \$150,000 for local families in need during its 25 iterations; the annual Prince William Regional Spelling Bee; and the Salvation Army's Christmas Basket campaign, which this year raised nearly \$25,000.

And we've helped hundreds of local businesses and organizations spread the word about their products, services and events. We've given them a local marketing option that is generally far more affordable than using larger regional media outlets. We've kept their advertising dollars here in Prince William.

Certainly, a lot has changed in the past 10 years, and InsideNoVa's digital component is more important than ever. We were lucky to be able to buy an existing URL when we launched the paper – and may still have the only paper in the country named after a website.

Today, our print newspaper reaches over 22,000 households a week across the county, from Quantico to Haymarket. And our website reaches over 700,000 readers a month, from all across Northern Virginia. Together, it's a powerful combination.

But it wouldn't be possible without your support, so for that we thank you. And we look forward to serving your information needs – in print and online – for decades to come.

*Bruce Potter is publisher of InsideNoVa. He can be reached at bpotter@insidenova.com.*



BRUCE POTTER

GUEST COLUMN | KRISTINA NOHE

## 2023: Unity or parade of pretenders?

There have been bazillion and markets as long as there have been people. No matter the time or the place – ancient Babylonia, 14th-century Tenochtitlan, Paris during the French Revolution, or any number of malls across the United States – if you want to know a people, go to where they shop.

This point was driven home recently when two aspects of my life intersected a week before Christmas: being the parent of teenagers and having knee surgery. The first meant I had a house full of kids who wanted to go shopping, and the second meant that I could not keep up with them. That's how I found myself sitting on a bench at the mall with the people of Prince William County hustling and bustling by.

Perhaps last-minute shoppers are not a scientific sampling of our community. But from my stakeout, it did seem to provide a good cross-section of society. Burt crooned about Silver Bells over the speakers while a man, speaking to someone on the phone in Urdu, strolled by with several gift bags swinging from his hand.

Above the din, a woman, not the mother trying to wrangle her kids, could be heard calling, "Matteo! Ven aqui al pronto." A trio of women, presumably three generations, were finishing their last-minute shopping. The youngest pushed the oldest in a wheelchair as the white-haired man snatched on an ice cream cone, and

laughter carried their bags. Too much focus has been on what divides us, but it was exhilarating to watch the banality of people living the counter-narrative: gangs of teenagers laughing together, smartly dressed women squeezing in a shopping excursion, couples swinging arms in perfect synchronicity hoping that the other will reach out and hold their hand, and kiosk hawkers calling out to passersby. There was comfort in the prosaic mundanity.



KRISTINA NOHE

Looming ahead is a busy election year as the Virginia Senate, House of Delegates, Soil and Water Conservation directors, clerk of court, commonwealth's attorney, sheriff, Board of County Supervisors, and School Board will all be up for election. Due to the 2020 Census, district lines have changed, and voters may be unfamiliar with the people asking for their votes.

No one knows how the elections will shake out, but the established pattern is that things will get nasty. No matter the issue, be it crime, teacher pay or land preservation, the proposed solution will be to blame someone else. The message will be that it is either the incompetence of the incumbent or the fault of an advocacy group – and the universal solution proposed will be "Vote for me!"

When unity is discussed, it is usually in terms of unifying one group against another. With our winner-takes-all mentality, it is a rare candidate who talks about trying to

unify disparate groups to work toward mutual understanding and compromise. That type of discussion takes time and willing participants, making it the antithesis of sound-bite messaging and tribal politics. It's nearly impossible to fit a nuanced argument on a postcard or discuss the complexity of a policy during a 30-second commercial. Therefore, volume tends to eclipse substance.

This year, the most productive question that could be asked of any of the dozens of candidates running for office is, "What is your plan for bringing together people who disagree with each other?"

That is very different from asking, "How are you going to get everyone what they want?" Having a plan to get people to talk to each other, to commit to finding areas of compromise, and to work for mutual understanding without trying to outflank the other side would be the best first step toward solving the myriad of issues facing our community.

Sitting on that bench during the last weeks of 2022, I saw everything we need to make Prince William a great place to live, work and raise a family: its people. Now we just need to find leaders who can bring those people together for a common cause. The 2023 campaigns will either reveal authentic, unifying leadership or will be the usual parade of divisive pretenders peddling discordant stagnation.

*Kristina Nohe is a political activist, adoption advocate and homeschooling mom who is proud to be from Prince William County.*