

Monday, October 26, 2009

Editorial: Shannon for attorney general

The Fairfax delegate promises legal leadership free from ideology, unlike his opponent.

When Virginians choose their next attorney general on Nov. 3, they will either continue the levelheaded, no-nonsense approach preferred by most previous holders of that office or install an ideological firebrand who would impose his radical morality on the commonwealth. We recommend they select the former in Steve Shannon.

The attorney general provides legal services to the commonwealth's agencies, defends the its laws and advocates on legal issues before the General Assembly. He should not follow an ideological course.

Shannon, the Democrat in the race, has the background to accomplish that. He correctly views the job as nonpartisan, and during his several terms as a delegate from Fairfax County, he built a record of bipartisan accomplishment.

He also is a former prosecutor and cofounder of the Metropolitan Washington Amber Alert Program, which means he is ready to oversee the law-and-order responsibilities of the office. Indeed, if anything, he possesses an overabundant interest in law enforcement. We hope that if elected he quickly learns that dealing with criminals is but a small part of the job.

Meanwhile, Shannon's opponent, Republican Ken Cuccinelli, would use the office to implement the extreme agenda that he could not push through the General Assembly as a senator from Fairfax County.

Among his stranger proposals as a legislator, he would have denied divorce to couples with minor children in cases when one spouse objected, urged Congress to amend the Constitution to deny citizenship to people born in the United States to noncitizens, and allowed people seeking a concealed weapon permit to complete their training online without ever handling a gun. Astoundingly, that last one became law.

Cuccinelli is a crusader against a woman's right to choose, gay rights, workers and any effort to confront climate change. To his credit, he does not duck on those issues. He affirms that, as attorney general, he would file states' rights lawsuits against the federal government if Washington passes laws contrary to his ultra-conservative views.

He also admits he would not defend any state law he deems unconstitutional, and that includes many progressive measures. Never mind that it is the attorney general's job to defend the commonwealth's laws and the courts' job to decide what is constitutional.

Cuccinelli says that if elected he does not plan to run for governor in four years. He envisions slowly shifting the commonwealth to the far right over multiple terms as attorney general. Voters should not give him the chance.

Shannon offers little flash, but he would serve all Virginians, not just one extreme of the political

spectrum.

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