

Democrats rally uptown

Perriello and Warner make stop

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By DEBBIE HALL - Bulletin Staff Writer
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Former governor Mark Warner and congressional candidate Tom Perriello stumped at a town hall meeting that turned into an impromptu rally during a swing through Martinsville on Thursday.

Supporters gathered on the lawn of the old Henry County courthouse chanted, "Yes we will," an alternative to the "Yes we can" mantra.

As Warner approached the podium on the courthouse lawn, a supporter climbed into the back of a truck parked nearby and displayed a homemade sign: "Mark, Tom, please, we need help."

It was not clear if Warner, a Democrat running for U.S. Senate, noticed the sign, but he addressed the concern.

When campaigning for governor, Warner vowed that if elected, he would not forget the Martinsville area, and he did not, he said. In fact, a member of the Henry County Board of Supervisors jokingly told him "I needed to start paying property taxes" because of his frequent visits to the area, Warner said.

As senator, "I will be back just as often. I will not forget Southside," he said, adding the images of Pillowtex workers who lost their jobs "through no fault of their own" stand out in his memory.

Warner said he will not only work to turn the economy around in Southside but will work to stabilize financial and credit markets.

"I don't think the American people should be investing long term" in those markets, he said. Referring to the bailout of financial institutions, Warner said taxpayers "should have been at the front of the line" for repayment.

Holding company officials accountable and developing long-term competitiveness plans also are goals, as is developing and maintaining the "best educated work force" in the world, Warner said.

Lowering health-care costs, creating "a 21st century plan to reinvest in our infrastructure" and projects such as Interstate 73 and broadband also are goals, as is energy independence, he said.

Although gas prices are comparatively low right now, “the folks who turned the spigot on can turn it back off,” Warner said.

Finding ways to address energy dependence also could boost job creation, he said.

“We may be the first country funding both sides of the war” because an estimated \$700 billion is spent to buy oil “from countries that don’t like us,” he said, adding his goal is to wean the United States from foreign oil within a decade by investing in auto manufacturers.

“Why couldn’t we have every level of government, federal, state and local,” as well as Fortune 500 companies that replace vehicles regularly, “put a three-year purchase order in place for all vehicles” produced by domestic manufacturers, Warner said.

Those entities would buy domestically produced vehicles that met certain specifications, such as getting 100 miles per gallon, Warner said. Within a couple of years, “we’d be selling vehicles to China rather than the other way around,” he said.

The first step in changing the status quo is by electing Democrat Sen. Barack Obama as the next president, Warner said. The same can be said for Perriello, who will “bring a fresh voice and new ideas” to Congress.

“And I argue we need somebody” in the Senate “who knows where Martinsville and Henry County is,” Warner said. “I’m unemployed and looking for work as well. Will you hire me to be your next U. S. senator?”

While campaigning for any office, politicians “always say it is a real important election,” Warner said. “This time, we’re not kidding. This is probably the most important election of my lifetime.”

He urged supporters to make sure their neighbors, friends, co-workers and others “realize what is at stake” Tuesday, and “please, get out and vote.”

Perriello, an Ivy Democrat challenging incumbent 5th District U.S. Rep. Virgil Goode Jr., R-Rocky Mount, used a football allegory to help illustrate how his campaign has progressed.

A few months ago “we were down by five touchdowns. Now, we’re within a field goal of winning,” Perriello said, as supporters clapped and cheered.

Even more exciting is the way Perriello and his supporters have accomplished that feat, he said.

“When I started out, I knew I didn’t have all the answers,” he said. However, he invested time to interview and talk with residents, and then used that input to create a seven-point plan for economic revitalization.

In comparison, Perriello said Goode’s campaign has relied on scare tactics such as an ad endorsed by Goode’s campaign that features a poor quality, “doctored” picture of a bearded, terrorist-looking Perriello.

“That doctored photo is not nearly as scary as the loss of 10,000 jobs” or the fact that 47 million Americans are without health care or the fact that banks and other lending institutions are on the verge of collapse, Perriello said.

“We need to put problem solving ahead of partisanship,” he said. “It shouldn’t matter whether you’re Democrat or Republican.” What matters is whether “you’re part of the problem or part of the solution.”

During a recent three-hour debate between the two candidates, Perriello said Goode tied virtually every concern to illegal immigration, including the problems in the mortgage industry. Perriello said the economic problems are the result of both parties’ “allowing the fox to guard the hen house.”

The 2008 election will be a historical event, Perriello said. “We are changing the rules of politics” by electing Perriello and Sen. Barack Obama.

“We have the chance to write a new chapter of American history,” Perriello said, and he encouraged those who are disillusioned with the election process to go to the polls and vote.

“You don’t have to give up on American politics” but rather cast a ballot for the change that is needed, he said.