NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Tom Perriello: better than Goode

Joe Feuerherd
| Nov. 8, 2008

The vote for the seat first held by James Madison keeps shifting. At 11:30 a.m. Nov. 5, the day after the election, the state Elections Board reported Perriello trailing six-term incumbent Virgil Goode by 145 votes. By 2:30 p.m. Goode's lead had dwindled to just six votes. Thirty-five minutes later, the Board reported Perriello up 30 votes. By Thursday morning, Nov. 6, Perriello led by 31 votes.

A recount will decide the contest.

The electoral strategy of Perriello's opponent, Goode, was one part pork and two parts fear. Goode touted the bacon he said he brought back to the district, including landing the bottled water distribution account on Capitol Hill for a local company. Meanwhile, he told Virginians that Perriello, a Yale-educated lawyer, was really a New Yorker, though the Democrat was born and raised in Virginia's Albemarle County.

Goode came briefly and ignominiously to national attention in 2007 when, commenting on the swearing-in of the first Muslim elected to Congress, Rep. Keith Ellison, D-Minn., he wrote: "If American citizens don't wake up and adopt the Virgil Goode position on immigration, there will likely be many more Muslims elected to office and demanding the use [during swearing-in ceremonies] of the Quran."

The Old Dominion's 5th District includes, to the north, affluent and educated Charlottesville, home to the University of Virginia, and, to the south, Danville, a once-thriving textile city now nearly crippled by NAFTA. It is an area a McCain spokesperson termed "the real Virginia" in a pre-election interview, not to be confused with the northern portion of the state, home to latté-sipping liberals and other suspect types.

It's in this real Virginia that Perriello, trailing last summer by double digits in the polls, launched a "Common Good Fellows Program" in which college-age students reached out to churches and community groups throughout the district to promote his candidacy. It was a move typical of his candidacy, whose staff, volunteers and financial contributors drew heavily from the young Catholic activist world where Perriello made a mark.

Perriello, who as a young man in the Richmond diocese looked to then-Bishop Walter Sullivan as a role model, cofounded Res Publica, a "public entrepreneurship fellowship," in 2003. He and his colleagues focused on building and strengthening the legal systems in war-torn Sierra Leone and Liberia. If it's a hotspot, Perriello has likely worked there: Afghanistan, Sudan, Kosovo, Argentina, Chile and India are among the areas where he has used his legal training to promote justice.

In 2004, Perriello and Res Publica focused their attention closer to home. The goal was to help defeat George W. Bush by reclaiming for Democrats the moral and religious language they had abandoned. It was rough going, as Perriello and others who agreed with the notion that Democrats could not simply ignore faith-motivated voters were greeted skeptically by those in the party who viewed any reference to God as a breach of "the wall" separating church and state.

That anti-Bush effort was a failure. Or was it?

In 2004, Perriello was among the prime movers in the reemergence of the Christian left as a genuine political force, combining his knowledge of technology with a can-do organizing philosophy so evident in his 2008 campaign. A new generation of Catholic and Christian activists -- represented by such groups as Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good, Catholics United, and the Matthew 25 Network political action committee -- was identified, activated and energized in 2004. They are not going away and maybe, just maybe, Perriello will represent both Virginia's 5th Congressional District and something much larger.

National Catholic Reporter November 14, 2008

Source URL (retrieved on *10/25/2014 - 20:29*): http://ncronline.org/news/politics/tom-perriello-better-goode