

ANY QUESTIONS?

Ralph Northam

The Virginia governor, 61, on casting his ballot for Dubya, dealing with the red/blue divide, and why Snoop Dogg shouldn't wait for a call anytime soon.

So you voted Republican as recently as George W. Bush for president?

Yes. I went to military school and served eight years active duty. I'm a proud American, a proud Virginian. I always thought it was the right thing to do—an obligation of citizens—to vote, but I wasn't involved in politics. I would just look and say, "Well, who would do the best job?" And back in that stage of my life, that's who I voted for. But since I got involved, I'm a proud Democrat.

Do you feel like your experience as both a Republican and a Democrat helps you work across the aisle?

Well, I wouldn't say I've ever been a Republican. I was apolitical and just voted for whoever I thought would do the best job ... Voting, criminal-justice reform, education, the environment—all of these issues that I feel very strongly about, I haven't had much help from Republicans. These are all Democratic initiatives. That's just where we are right now.

Are we all more partisan than when you first ran for state office in 2007?

It's partisan. I'll give you a quick example: marijuana. I would venture to say there are a number of folks that align with the Republican side of the aisle that probably use marijuana. The legalization of marijuana polls very well. It's more than just a Democrat or Republican issue. But no Republicans in the House or the Senate voted to legalize marijuana. I regret that.



You've worked to abolish the death penalty, bring Amazon to Virginia, and legalize marijuana even faster than it was going to be. What topics have voters been the loudest on?

Of all the things, I've probably gotten the most feedback on Medicaid expansion, especially during COVID-19. Over 500,000 Virginians now have access to healthcare that didn't before, and I just can't imagine having been through this last year—what someone would do if they couldn't go see a provider. The other thing that I've gotten a tremendous amount of feedback from is repealing the death sentence. We've been dealing with equity issues in Virginia for 400 years now of history, and a lot of it's not good history. One of those issues was the death penalty. We had the most executions of any other state, and that's something nobody should want to claim.

Given the progressive gains you've made, how Southern a state is Virginia at this point?

I never really looked at Virginia as being Southern or Northern or below the Mason-Dixon Line, however you want to describe it. What I have tried to do is listen to Virginians and then turn that into action. I think Virginia's become a lot more progressive.

What famous person would you most like to share a joint with?

I've never used marijuana, and I don't know if I will. I'll cross that bridge when I get to it.

KELLY KENDALL 

PHOTO BY JACK NAVER