Dear Abdus, Art, Brenda, Jeanne, Kathy, Linda, Michael, Peter, Ray, Rick, Sarah, and Tistrya,

Given our difficult and complicated situation, I’ve taken a deep dive into the issues, and emerged with a strong case for approving the CCDC recommendation to re-appoint Virginia Martin. I hope you will give it your time and attention.

Let’s start with the indisputably positive:

**Virginia’s commitment to the board:**She has spent a decade working close to if not full time on part-time salary. Jason Nastke, her Republican counterpart, is the polar opposite, meaning Virginia and staff have had far more work, not to mention lack of cooperation from all Republican staff.

**Virginia’s commitment to the party:**Many town chairs, committees, and poll workers are more than happy with and grateful for Virginia’s attention and guidance in their caucuses and elections.

**Virginia's national reputation for hand-counting paper ballots:**Virginia’s integrity is a given. Fully committed to fair elections, some years ago she proposed hand counting of paper ballots and got Jason to agree. Columbia County has a national profile as the only county in the country that does so substantively, and Virginia has a national reputation in the election integrity movement, where she’s in demand as a speaker and panelist. If we can improve Georgia’s or North Carolina’s or Florida’s or other states’ elections, we should try, and Virginia has been called upon to do that.

And then there are the concerns:

**Voter registration.**On one side, some believe Virginia is not responsive to minorities. On the other, that she is unresponsive to challenges. Virginia’s answer is that she always upholds the law, which can make registration complicated and difficult. She also recognizes that the system relies heavily on the mail, which many Hudson voters don’t engage with, so she tries to help voters get and stay registered and has offered, twice, to co-host information meetings and create and distribute a concise one-pager.

**The Republican commissioner needs to go:**Some think the only way Republicans will agree to remove Jason is to remove Virginia as well. Or that Republicans won’t agree to making the position full-time unless both are removed. Not true. It has already been agreed that the position will be full time, which means Jason will leave, because he has another full-time job.

**2019 Election:**The following is a condensed version of what I’ve learned about election concerns. If you would like more detail or just a discussion**,** please let me know.

**Problems with early voting.**Concerns: A lack of early planning, ballots that didn’t scan, and eight absentee ballots for Chatham sent to Claverack voters. Explanations: Virginia’s counterpart was MIA; she did as much planning, starting months before the election, as she could on her own. The ballot printer wasn’t moved properly by the manufacturer; Virginia corrected the problem overnight and safeguarded the problematic ballots for hand counting. Absentee ballots went awry almost certainly because of a Republican staffer error. (Not every Republican error—and there are many—can be caught by Democratic oversight.)

**Problems on election day:**Concerns: Security seals on some machines and supplies for some poll bags were missing. Confusion about the polling place in Austerlitz. Late training for inspectors. Explanations: Seals are considered ‘security theatre’ by experts (it’s the ballot chain of custody and hand counting that provide real election security). Nonetheless, it happened because of the immense list of new requirements imposed on the board, which landed on all staff, some of them brand new, including a disengaged Rep, and a frenetic office move due to a flea infestation. Austerlitz was Jason’s responsibility; he sent the notice late and to the wrong list.

**Late election results:**Concerns: Most unofficial results weren’t posted until Friday after Election Day, and the election was certified late. Explanation: The machines couldn’t coordinate early voting and election day results. A large part of the problem arose because the warranty had expired and the manufacturer didn’t explain what that could mean. Also, one departing staffer had left without providing explanations for key procedures. As for late certification, it’s not at all unusual; it happens in many counties, and it’s not at all surprising in this election, in which a neighboring county certified a full week later than Columbia.

**Conclusion. And the best argument of all**

The election was a perfect storm, most of it beyond Virginia’s control. The letters to the caucus from Dustin Czarny and Douglas Kellner in support of Virginia both mention statewide problems, some worse than ours, due in large measure to what they perceive as an intentional statewide Republican effort to make early voting difficult because it was a Democratic initiative. In fact, a departing Columbia Countystaffer had said repeatedly that he wanted to see not only early voting, but the entire election fail.

The position is becoming full time, with full-time salary, a bigger budget, and oversight and support from a bipartisan committee and the Board of Supervisors. To discard Virginia who has worked tirelessly with none of that in place, just as proper salary, budget and support are coming, is unfair in the extreme and unworthy of the Democratic Party.

But it is also extremely unwise, and this is the most compelling argument.  As Czarny and Kellner and others in the caucus have said, 2020 is a crucial presidential, federal, and state election year with two primaries and a general with 27 days of early voting. It will be hard enough with one inexperienced commissioner at the helm. With two, it could be an utter disaster. Unlike everyone else at the board, Virginia has a decade of institutional memory.

None of which is to say that Virginia does not own the mistakes that were made. She said so in her presentation to the CCDC and is happy, eager in fact, to address individual concerns and work on improving relationships.

I’m asking that you take all this in and see if you can come out the other side, for the good of the board, the party, the county, the assembly districts, the senate district, the congressional district, and beyond. It is not a failing to change your mind, if your mind is open. On the contrary; it is a foundational tenet of the Democratic Party.

With many thanks,

Enid Futterman, Claverack ED5 Rep

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