

# Youth Showing Us the Way

Delegate Kenneth R. "Ken" Plum

One of the greatest inspirational moments at the Virginia Women's Summit for Political Engagement at Tysons Corner recently was the reading of a **poem written by a 14-year old eighth-grader on why everyone should vote** even though at her age she cannot. It was perceptive, hard-hitting, and truthful.

There are numerous projects undertaken by high school students throughout the region each year that show such deep caring and humility that they are awarded Peace Prizes. Many of the projects are international in scope and reflect concerns about peoples' human rights and basic comforts of living. The young people identify the need and execute programs that will help respond to the need and make life a bit better for others.

The youth group at the church I attend recently returned from a mission trip to Puerto Rico where they worked through the heat, bugs and discomforts to help put back together a school that was nearly destroyed in the hurricane a couple of years ago. At another church nearby **the youth group worked with Habitat for Humanity in building houses for people who were living in substandard housing.**

A young woman I know who is off to study at an Ivy League school recognized while she was in middle school that young people especially girls were going to need coding skills if they were going to be successful in the world of technology. **She organized a summer coding instruction program and managed it herself before she had even finished high school.**

I have not identified these young people by name as they are but a small although very important sampling of activities that I encounter almost every day of young people who are showing us the way in recognizing human challenges, need for social justice interventions, and personal involvement. We need to pay attention to them and encourage their efforts.

Sometimes through their inexperience youth may over-reach in their goals and falter in the execution of their plans, but the importance of their caring for others and wanting to do something about social needs is many times more important than a misstep here or there. The alternative is the too-often adult positions of hesitancy to get involved, complacency with the way things are, or pure selfishness. We do not fool young people by giving lip service to caring for others and the quality of life in our community. We need to join with our young people not to re-direct or take over their efforts but to adopt the characteristics they show that are not yet shadowed with cynicism, wariness, or hopelessness. **Our youth can help show us the way.**

Delegate Kenneth R. "Ken" Plum represents the 36th District, including all of Reston, in the Virginia House of Delegates

