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Lee Carter and the Future of the Democrats

By CARTER BRIGLIA
STAFF WRITER

On November 5, an electoral blue wave swept Virginia. The Democrats won both the House of Delegates and the state Senate, marking the first time in 20 years that they have controlled the lower house. This gives the Democratic Party full control of the state government, since the

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governor is Democrat Ralph Northam.

While the result indicates that Virginia is becoming an increasingly blue state, it also carries serious policy implications. Republicans have blocked most major Democratic-led legislation in Virginia, including repeal of the "right-to-work" law, gun safety regulations, and raising the state's minimum wage. For example, after the Virginia Beach shooting in May that claimed the lives of twelve people, Northam called a special legislative session to deal with gun violence. Republicans refused to address the issue and adjourned the session after 90 minutes, failing to consider a single bill. Under a Democratic majority, significant changes may be seen on that front and on other issues.

I found the campaign of Lee Carter, a Marine veteran and a self-proclaimed member of the Democratic Socialists of America, especially interesting. In 2017, Carter was elected to represent Virginia's 50th House district, which had been represented by Republicans since 1982. After serving one term he was up for re-election, running

against Republican challenger Ian Lovejoy, a city councilman. Carter faced numerous attack ads from conservatives and a website dedicated to attacking his character by calling him a "deadbeat." But his reputation held strong on the left wing of the Democratic Party. He amassed a Twitter following of over 53,000, and Senator Bernie Sanders traveled to Virginia to campaign for him on the night before the election. The attention paid off at the polls, as Carter won with 53.3 percent of the vote.

Carter's campaign demonstrated what it will take for Democrats to win in toss-up states that have been substantially affected by neoliberal policies and globalization. Despite being a vocal socialist, he focused on "kitchen table" issues and was able to show his character to working-class voters. He vocally supported policies such as ensuring universal health care coverage in Virginia, raising teacher pay, investing in renewable energy and ending fracking, and helping workers by repealing the right-to-work law that makes unionization harder and

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by raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour. Despite being well to the left of the common window of policy discourse in America in some respects, Carter quickly became a political sensation, both in his district and online. His campaign, along with many in Virginia, showed the political world that it is not necessary for politicians to "run to the center"

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"I Have Called You Friends"

By CLAIRE ANASTASIA KITZ
GUEST CONTRIBUTOR

The de Nicola Center for Ethics and Culture at the University of Notre Dame hosted its 20th annual Fall Conference on November 7-9. The purpose of this forum is to delve into the full range of the Catholic and Christian intellectual traditions and thereby provide a means of engagement with wider communities in discussions of ethics, culture, and policy. Past topics have included Beauty, Justice, Poverty, the "Culture of Life," Modernity, and Freedom. The theme this year was "I Have Called You Friends." Conference speakers surveyed friendship from Aristotelian concepts of it to current descriptive ones; the subject was examined across a myriad of disciplines, including philosophy, the arts, the sciences, and theology. Learned scholars from across the United States and Europe came to opine on permanent questions: What is the meaning and value of friendship, and what does it reveal in light of Christian and Catholic teaching? What are the ancient, modern, social, political, and spiritual truths about it?

Over the three days, there were multiple groups of one, two, and three lecturers, with a chairperson/facilitator and question-and-answer periods. The keynote speakers were Stanley Hauerwas of Duke Divinity School, the Most Rev. Borys Gudziak of the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Philadelphia, and Whit Stillman, writer, director, and filmmaker of "Metropolitan," "Barcelona," "The Last Days of Disco," and "Love & Friendship." Each keynote speaker contributed a distinctive perspective on the intellectual ecosystem of friendship.

Just as a sampling, the colloquium sessions ranged from *When I was in*

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LEE CARTER . . . cont.

to win in battleground districts. As Carter tweeted: “Some of the strongest pro-worker voices in the VA House are my colleagues that flipped red seats in Prince William County in 2017. And we all won re-election . . . And I still hear centrists saying ‘you can’t stand up for your values too much if you want to win swing seats.’ C’mon, y’all.”

I think Lee Carter is entirely correct. Democrats should not be scared to show their true values. Working-class Americans are able to recognize when someone is fighting for them, and are increasingly rejecting the politicians of the past who sold out to corporate interests for campaign donations. I believe that Hillary Clinton couldn’t convince voters she would genuinely

fight for them because she largely ignored the working class in the Rust Belt. Politicians such as Carter are demonstrating that even though they advocate certain policies deemed “radical” by mainstream media, the working class will support those who speak to the issues of its communities.

Looking toward 2020 and facing President Trump, Democrats should not be scared to stay true to their beliefs and advocate for the working class. Rather than conceding ground on issues such as universal health care and raising the minimum wage, they have the opportunity to win back the working class and regain their identity. For a party that currently struggles to sell its case to voters and relies too much on identity politics, staying

true to liberal policies will signal to working-class Americans that the Democrats are on their side. When billionaires have a lower effective tax rate than teachers and mechanics (if we consider the taxes at all three levels of government, including payroll and sales taxes) and Trump’s tax cut has given so much to the wealthy, the Democratic Party has a great opportunity to win back the Rust Belt and other working communities. If the Democrats want to beat Trump in 2020, they must first look toward crucial states they lost in 2016 such as Michigan, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and Ohio. If the party can gain the trust of these industrial, working-class states, it will have a great shot at taking back the White House.

“I HAVE CALLED YOU FRIENDS” cont.

Prison You Visited Me: Incarceration, Ministry, and The Abolition of Friendship, to *Beauty Beheld in Common and Friendship*, to *Building Social Capital*, to “If You Love Those Who Love You”: *The Problem of Preference*. The *Beauty Beheld in Common and Friendship* colloquium had two erudite scholars and art historians, one from Paris and the other from Rome, Jennifer Donnelly and Elizabeth Lev. Donnelly’s topic was “Moldy Relics and Modern Art: Mass,

included such intellectual lights as Alasdair MacIntyre, Sir Roger Scruton, John Finnis, Mary Ann Glendon, Charles Taylor, James Heckman, the aforementioned Jennifer Donnelly and Elizabeth Lev, John Waters, Monsignor Timothy Verdon, Rémi Brague, Giulio De Ligio, Pia de Solenni, David Bentley Hart, Etsuro Sotoo, Gilbert Meilaender, and Jean Bethke Elshtain.

Each contributor fulfilled the Ethics and Culture center conference’s purpose: to reinforce the habit of intellectual and philosophical inquiry; to define, ask,

St. Augustine, Dante, Michelangelo, Raphael, Evelyn Waugh, Chesterton, Weil, Yeats, Jane Austen, Dickens, Dostoevsky, Jean Vanier, and T. S. Eliot. They spoke to us across space and time.

The Fall Conference offered those who attended it a conversation about what is possible, about the values lost and longed for in humanity, and a respite from political rows and scorched-earth rhetoric. It was a courageous venture intending to influence minds and change hearts – by fostering dialogue and asking: What do the common good

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Museum, and Friendship with Objects,” and Lev’s was “The Art of Friendship: The Sacred Conversation.” As a Hamilton ‘19 graduate in Art History and Classical Studies, I found their presentations on how art, architecture, and objects can cultivate and inspire dialogue, model friendship, and provoke a spiritual response both noteworthy and moving. These talks were followed by a lively question-and-answer period.

The conversations and exchanges were enhanced by the size of the roster and the audience: more than 100 speakers and more than 1,000 attendees. Past and present speakers at the annual conference have

clarify, and add to the discussion of the question: What is humanity’s ideal road map in the modern world? The annual conference, as I see it, has sought to broaden the Christian and Catholic moral anthology and thereby recognize the power of the individual, of institutions, and of art and other human products to inform and mold the culture--not to the current zeitgeist, but toward more coherent ways of thinking and being.

The Christian canon, as conference participants attested, could be an antidote to moral failure and societal chaos. The moral imagination was shown as relevant to such discussions, with examples including Aristotle, Plato, Vergil, St. Paul,

and friendship look like on campuses, in broader communities, in the United States and the world? Perhaps venues such as this conference can serve as a conduit, link, or passage “between those who believe in values realizable in time on earth, and those who believe in values realized out of time . . .” (Eliot). A resounding “amen” to that labor is owed.

Sieneese artist Giovanni di Paolo painted “Paradise” in tempera and gold in 1445. A copy of the artwork was on the cover of the Fall Conference program. The original artwork can be seen at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

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CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION

1. *Lee Carter and the Future of the Democrats*
#DemocraticFuture
2. *“I Have Called You Friends”*
#IHaveCalledYouFriends