

Fairfax NAACP Hosts Community Forum with U. S. Senator Tim Kaine

It was a dark and stormy night on Thursday, January 11, but that didn't stop nearly 100 committed NAACP members and other community leaders from attending a one-on-one Community Forum with Senator Tim Kaine (D-VA). Held at a local community center near the Kings Park Library (where Fairfax NAACP holds its monthly membership meetings), the event served as one of the earliest voter engagement opportunities for the Kaine re-election campaign while also highlighting many of the core issues concerning civil rights advocates in the Trump era.

On full display were discussions of immigrant rights; the resurgence of the KKK and other white supremacist groups; criminal justice reform, both at the state and the federal level; LGBT issues; voter protections in a post Voting Rights Act world; and the deteriorating state of the environment.

Fairfax County NAACP President Kofi Annan welcomed Kaine to the enthusiastic gathering and got right down to business, posing a series of hard-hitting questions about DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals); Charlottesville and the harmful power of Confederate Symbols; and the so called "School-to-Prison Pipeline" that puts so many children of color at risk.

Kaine was adept and forthright in addressing Annan's concerns, as well as those of the crowd, and the gathering had the feel of a heart-to-heart talk with a good friend. Kaine, having just come from his Senate Office in downtown Washington, D.C., was plainspoken when it came to the President and his agenda. "He's just mean spirited and he likes to get into fights," Kaine said. "That's just who he is." But Kaine was inclined to look past the bluster and see what kind of political deals could be struck on behalf of the American people.

He was hopeful that a DACA deal, which had just been unveiled that afternoon, could be brought to the floor of the Senate by the following Friday (1/19)—something that failed to happen, in part due to the President's comments about African countries and Haiti earlier in the day. Kaine was less inclined to take Trump's public posturing as the measure of the man. Kaine pointed to two bills the President signed that he thought would have had little or no chance: a resolution condemning white supremacy (in the wake of the Charlottesville debacle) and a resolution acknowledging 400 years of African people in the Americas.

Kaine showed a depth of knowledge and ability to speak plainly about issues that concern the African American community. He cited his early professional beginnings

as a civil rights lawyer and later his stint as Mayor of the City of Richmond, with its significant African American population.

Kaine praised outgoing Governor Terry McAuliffe (D) for his determined insistence that returning offenders deserve a second chance, including restoration of their voting rights. And he lamented to stalled federal criminal justice reform package that had such promise and bipartisan support in early 2016 but stalled in the heated rhetoric of the 2016 campaign. “It’s very disappointing what’s happening at the federal level,” he said. Unfortunately, Kaine gave no indication that Democrats would attempt to revive the initiative in the current Congress.

On other matters, Kaine praised the “Diversion First” program recently implemented in Fairfax County to move citizens with mental health issues into treatment rather than treating them as criminals. He also lamented the recent passage of the tax legislation on Capitol Hill. “Part of my problem with the tax bill was that it had not funding for public health or education,” Kaine said. “All of the funds are going to people who don’t need (them).

With regard to LGBT equality, Kaine suggested that he is in favor of a comprehensive adjustment to all civil rights legislation, urging the addition of LGBTQ recognition into any and all previously enacted bills, just as the laws now make it illegal to discriminate against women, or against people of a particular religion or racial makeup.

On Voting Rights, Kaine insisted that “we have to get the Voting Rights Act restored,” referring to the Section 5 Preclearance section that was struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2013. “Donald Trump isn’t serious about voter protection,” he said. “Luckily, elections are run by states, not the federal government.”

In addressing the current rise of openly white supremacist activity, Kaine noted that the President decried the New York City car incident (where a Muslim extremist ran over strolling citizens) and condemned terrorism over the summer in Barcelona, Spain, but refuses to call out the terrorism perpetrated by U.S. citizens in the form of white supremacy. “There is a complete moral vacuum in the White House,” Kaine said.

After prodding by the NAACP’s Annan, Kaine declared unequivocally that “The KKK is a terrorist organization” and he decried the white-supremacist-led events in Charlottesville over the summer. Kaine recounted how, as mayor of the city of Richmond, he collaborated with other city officials to install a statue of African-American tennis great Arthur Ashe on Monument Avenue, the grand avenue in

Virginia's capital city lined with statues of Confederate soldiers. Kaine also suggested that the statue of Robert E. Lee—one of two statues (the other of George Washington) selected by Virginia State Legislators to be housed in the Rotunda of the U.S. Capitol—needs to be replaced. "These statues were not intended to be there forever," Kaine observed. "And I'm sure we can find other deserving Virginians to represent all of Virginia."

After 90 minutes of dialog, the gathering ended on a positive note. Both Annan and Kaine thanked all of the sponsors of the event, including the Fairfax County NAACP, the Tinner Hill Foundation, the All Dulles Area Muslim Society (ADAMS); the National Korean American Service & Education Consortium (NKASEC), FCPS Pride, CASA, and a number of other community-based groups.

A complete list of co-sponsors of the event follows:

- ADAMS Center
- FCPS Pride
- Fairfax County NAACP - Executive Committee and members
- Fairfax County NAACP Youth Group
- GMU NAACP
- Tinner Hill Heritage Foundation
- Black Women United For Action
- Omicron Kappa Kappa Chapter, Omega Psi Phi Fraternity
- Fairfax County Alumnae Chapter, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority
- Reston-Dulles Section: National Council of Negro Women
- Sierra Club
- CASA
- NOVA Black Attorney Association
- National Korean American Service & Education Consortium (NAKASEC)
- NOVA Black Attorney Association
- National Coalition of Black Women

Special thanks go to our hosts:

- Regency
- Giardino Restaurant
- Braddock Road Youth Club