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Bolling is ready for a second term as lieutenant governor. Shannon is the balanced choice for attorney general

Bolling for lieutenant governor

The job of lieutenant governor is part-time in Virginia, because the office holder is called on to make a meaningful contribution only in rare circumstances: when the governor cannot serve and when a tie vote must be broken in the state Senate. Many lieutenant governors are essentially preparing a path to the governor's mansion. Both incumbent Bill Bolling, a Republican, and Democrat Jody Wagner have their eyes eventually on that top job. Neither is yet a fully prepared prospect for chief executive, but Bolling is a good choice for a second term in the job they're seeking now.

In part, that's because he has chosen the tack of the man he wants to serve with, Bob McDonnell, aligning his politics with the more moderate segment of his party and the electorate. Bolling speaks the language of fiscal restraint and limited government, and has distanced himself from the days when he paired anti-tax rhetoric with extravagant promises of new or improved state services. And, though he remains against abortion, against gay marriage and against any limitation on gun rights, he has not made those social issues a centerpiece in this campaign. He should stay true to that pragmatic spirit if he is elected.

Democrat Jody Wagner's experience as a corporate lawyer, state treasurer and state finance secretary make her a credible candidate for state office. But the job of lieutenant governor won't call on her knowledge of state finance.

Bolling and McDonnell have run as partners in the pragmatic middle. It's a winning combination.

Shannon for attorney general

Like lieutenant governor, attorney general is often a grooming ground for a would-be governor. That would be reason enough to say no to Ken Cuccinelli. But Democrat Steve Shannon also represents a positive, moderate choice in his own right.

Unlike fellow Republicans McDonnell and Bolling, Cuccinelli represents the intractable and intolerant wing of his party. His campaign material lists as top issues gun rights, immigration, abortion and fending off gay marriage. These are not issues Virginia needs its attorney general concentrating on. Others he highlights, such as mental health and gangs, truly are important issues, but they aren't really the bailiwick of the attorney general.

The real job of the attorney general, as both candidates privately observe, is to run the state's law firm, providing representation to state government and agencies. While some activist attorneys general have used the office to pursue distinctive agendas — think of New York's Eliot Spitzer going after Wall Street — it is more a management job in Virginia, and more the state's top lawyer than its top cop.

Yet the voters expect a law enforcement edge, and Shannon provides that, too. He is campaigning to coordinate and strengthen state resources in the fight against child pornography and sexual exploitation of children via the Internet. This cause is neither liberal nor conservative, but just good for Virginia. It's one Shannon understands, based on his years prosecuting child abuse cases in Fairfax.

Choosing Shannon is a way for voters to reinforce the message to the Virginia Republican Party that it can't allow itself to be hijacked by social hard-liners. Those positions do not represent the values of most Virginians, nor are they where solutions to our state's real needs will be found.

A vote for Shannon is a vote for balance and for a centrist approach to governing.