

19 of 44 DOCUMENTS

The Washington Post

washingtonpost.com

The Washington Post

August 11, 2005 Thursday

Final Edition

Albo May Face Tough Challenge From Werkheiser

BYLINE: Michael D. Shear, Washington Post Staff Writer

SECTION: Virginia Extra; T03 , Virginia Notebook

LENGTH: 746 words

Beneath the increasingly clamorous governor's race are a number of fascinating campaigns for the House of Delegates.

All 100 seats will be voted on. Most incumbents are facing either no challengers or only token opposition. The outcomes of the few real races will help determine whether the Republicans are able to solidify their control after a shaky term or the Democrats will continue their slow climb back.

During the next three months, this column will highlight a few of the competitive House races and introduce some of the personalities vying for the seats.

Let's start with the 42nd District, a sprawling stretch on the southern edge of Fairfax County from Pohick Bay along the Occoquan River toward Clifton.

The district has been held for more than a decade by David B. Albo (R), a young lawyer with a penchant for the occasional frat-boy comment. A member of the Republican leadership's inner circle, he will ascend to chair the House Courts Committee if he is reelected Nov. 8.

Albo is being challenged by **Greg Werkheiser** (D), an even younger lawyer who has stunned the political establishment by raising close to \$250,000, almost as much as Albo. Werkheiser's cash, and his eagerness, has made Albo work for his seat for the first time since he was elected.

Despite that, most people believe that Albo will win. They probably are right. Incumbents in the U.S. political system have a huge advantage.

Albo is no run-of-the-mill incumbent. The Courts Committee arguably is the most important and high-profile committee in the General Assembly, with jurisdiction over criminal laws and judges. It has produced statewide candidates, including the current Republican hopeful for attorney general, Del. Robert F. McDonnell (R-Virginia

Beach).

Albo has pressed for stiffer sentences for gang members and drunk drivers. He opposed tax increases that Gov. Mark R. Warner (D) fought for during the 2004 session. And he has recently become aggressive in seeking restrictions on illegal immigrants.

His Web site brags: "While Federal agencies are responsible for policing our borders, state and local agencies can do something. Dave has worked with them to ensure that citizens and legal immigrants receive the most from the state and local resources they pay for with their taxes while illegal aliens do not."

But Albo, 43, does not have a free ride to the winner's circle.

Werkheiser, 31, has one of the more intriguing personal histories in recent political memory. That combined with good looks, a quick wit and a quarter of a million dollars might provide the biggest upset of the season.

He grew up poor (what politician didn't?). But he grew up really poor, in rural Pennsylvania. He worked three jobs in high school, including as a commercial dry cleaner, in which he says he shook maggots from the sheets.

He was too poor to attend William and Mary until a benevolent investment banker heard his grandmother relate his story at a local diner. A week later, Werkheiser says, a letter arrived from the banker with a \$10,000 check. "Do well at the College of William and Mary, leave it a better place for your having been there, and put yourself in a position to one day do the same thing for someone else," the letter said.

Another check appeared a year later, and so on.

Werkheiser's time at college sparked a passion for politics. After college, he worked as a speechwriter for Warner during his failed U.S. Senate bid, lived in Paris and founded a nonprofit institute to instill civic-mindedness in young people.

After law school at the University of Virginia, Werkheiser moved to Springfield and began plotting his entry into state politics. He readily acknowledges planning for this race for more than two years. It's his way of giving back, he says.

Can he win?

It will be an uphill battle. But he holds a wild card that could turn events in his favor. The wild card is Warner.

Werkheiser claims Warner not only as a political ally but also as a friend. He says Warner has pledged to go to the mat for him at the end of the campaign.

Warner calls Werkheiser "incredibly earnest" and says he will help him in any way he can. With Warner's popularity at 74 percent in a recent poll, that could spell trouble for Albo.

But Warner admits that transferring his political popularity onto someone else is a challenge. "How do you do that?" he said recently. "I'm not sure I know how to do that."

Werkheiser probably has a few thoughts on that.

LOAD-DATE: August 11, 2005

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

PUBLICATION-TYPE: Newspaper

Copyright 2005 The Washington Post