

## **UNUSUAL ALLIANCE BINDS GOVERNOR, HOUSE SPEAKER**

Editorial

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ONE OF THE first assignments for any new governor is to get to know the speaker of the House. That won't be a problem for Gov.-elect Bob McDonnell, who has been friends with Bill Howell for 18 years.

That relationship could be a big advantage for McDonnell and Howell, but it also puts considerable pressure on both men.

"I'm looking forward to working with a guy who shares my philosophical underpinnings," Howell said last week. "There aren't as many excuses for not accomplishing things now."

"We've got an extraordinary opportunity to do some positive things," McDonnell added. "Bill and I are committed to producing very tangible results."

An incoming Virginia governor hasn't shared the same party affiliation with the sitting speaker since 1990. A.L. Philpott endorsed Doug Wilder in his election, which started their partnership off on a cordial note, although their friendship later soured.

McDonnell and Howell have stronger personal ties. As delegates, they started a Bible study that still meets when the General Assembly is in session. McDonnell attended on occasion after he was elected attorney general.

They also served together on the House Courts of Justice Committee, and for a period served as chairman and vice chairman of the panel. In 2002, the two men briefly were competitors to replace former Speaker Vance Wilkins. There was no noticeable tension between the two, however, and McDonnell ultimately threw his support behind Howell for the job.

Despite their shared philosophy, the two have strikingly different personalities and leadership styles. Howell has little patience for an abundance of details, while McDonnell is happiest when he's up to his eyeballs in minutiae. That contrast was often on display during Courts committee meetings.

"Bob would make us go to 10 or 11 o'clock at night because he wanted to fix every bill," Howell recalled. "I would tell people to come back when they had the bill fixed. I have a very limited attention span."

The two men don't expect the next four years to be uniformly rosy.

“We’re not going to agree on everything,” Howell said. “There’s a natural tension between the executive and legislative branch. This is a good opportunity to overcome that tension because Bob and I can sit down and work things through.”

McDonnell is likely to feel more pressure to compromise so he can show he is accomplishing his goals and forging a legacy. But Howell will be in a position of power now that he’s strengthened his majority in the House of Delegates. He may be less inclined to bend.

Further, Howell has had trouble getting consensus from his unruly Republican caucus when he wanted to make a deal with past Democratic governors. Many of the new Republican delegates are indebted to him for his financial support in their elections this year, but the speaker still has a lot of egos to contend with. It will be far more awkward if he fails to bring home the votes for a Republican executive.

McDonnell and Howell already disagree over whether to pursue reforms to the 2011 process for drawing new legislative and congressional districts. Other disputes are bound to arise as they wrestle with a \$3.5 billion budget shortfall. But McDonnell doesn’t expect those issues to undermine what could be an historic alliance.

Besides, he knows Howell’s favorite brand of cigar.