

Putting the Passion Back Into Politics



Photo courtesy of Michaele White

At the restored colonial Capitol in Williamsburg, on Jan. 14, 2006, Supreme Court Chief Justice Leroy Hassell Sr. swears in Timothy Kaine as the governor of Virginia. Wife Anne Holton is by his side.

Consider the last time you acted politically. If the memory is not especially pleasant, you are not alone. Americans are increasingly leery of all things political, finding it polarizing, frustrating and a whole lot less rewarding than leisure or professional pursuits. Governors Tim Kaine and Ted Kulongoski, both Mizzou alumni and fierce believers in the democratic process, would like to change that.

Story by Amy Spindler

Finding the middle ground

Virginia Democratic Gov. Tim Kaine laughs heartily when he hears that his local newspaper dubbed him as a man who doesn't travel well on a bumper sticker. "Well, that's a compliment," he says and then explains: "I'm not a super party-line guy. I've got views that are very much characteristic of the mainstream Democratic party, but I work with a lot of Republicans on issues, as well."

Kaine, BA '79, who campaigned as a fiscal conservative and dedicated Christian, was elected in November 2005. As party lines become increasingly polarized nationally, he's a refreshing anomaly, which is perhaps why he was chosen to give the Democratic response to President Bush's State of the Union in January 2006. "I had been in office for about five days," he says. "I felt honored and surprised."

During that speech, he told of his work as a missionary in Honduras: "I learned to measure my life by the difference I can make in someone else's life." Kaine's idealism comes from his mentor, Jim O'Leary, whom he met in Honduras while teaching carpentry at a vocational school founded by O'Leary.

"Jim was a guy who didn't own much more than the clothes on his back. He was such a joyous person and had a real infec-

tious sense of 'This is what makes life worth living,'" Kaine says. "We all hear that we're supposed to make a difference in someone else's life. But for most of us, there has to come a time when it's not just a lesson you hear, but you really get it under your skin and want to do it. For me, that was the expe-

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rience of working with Jim."

After eight months in Honduras, Kaine returned to the United States and began his second year at Harvard Law School, where he met his wife, Anne. "Anne's former boyfriend is now a professor of economics at Harvard," says Whitney Hicks, MU professor emeritus of economics and a family friend. "She once told me that she traded in someone who had his head in the clouds, as most economists do, for a person [Kaine] who had

his feet firmly on the ground."

Kaine's experience as a lawyer propelled him into the race for the Richmond City Council. "I did a lot of fair-housing cases and civil rights work, which I like because it feels good to build bridges," Kaine says. "Every so often I had a case before City Council and often saw racial block voting. It really disturbed me because it sent a message to the community that the leadership was separated. It made me mad, and it was bad enough that I actually decided to run for office."

Kaine served four terms on the Richmond City Council, including two terms as mayor, before serving as lieutenant governor in 2001.

"Differences in opinion are a good thing because you hash them out and come to a more elevated understanding of things. But differences that keep people apart are something that I still find a lot of. I like to get people together and make things happen. I view myself as a problem solver."

As governor, he faces pressing issues like solving Virginia's transportation problems and improving public schools and higher education. He created the Start Strong Council by executive order to expand access to pre-kindergarten programs. "Brains are virtually fully developed by age 5," he says, "yet we put a vast majority of our public dollars into public education after kids' brains have developed."

His transportation plan calls for better communication between the state and local governments, greater accountability of transportation funds and sustainable investments. The Virginia Transit Association commended Kaine for his proposal, which would double funds to improve infrastructure and service of public transportation. Kaine hopes to raise \$1 billion by increasing transportation-related fees; this would protect the state budget's general fund, and consequently, funds for public education.

Financial need and the School of Journalism's reputation drew Kaine, a Kansas City, Mo., native, to MU. He planned to study journalism but quickly changed his mind. "The journalism students I hung out with were all too cynical for me," Kaine says. "I thought, 'If I hang out with these guys for four years, I won't be fit to live with.' I didn't want to go into a cynical profession, so I became a lawyer and a politician. Go figure."

Kaine, who graduated in three years, found his niche in the economics department. He was a teaching assistant for the late Walter Johnson and enjoyed home-cooked meals with Hicks, then chair of the economics department, and his wife, Marjorie. "They were my guardian angels," Kaine says.

When not in class, Kaine spent most of his time outdoors. "I love hiking, camping, canoeing and caving. My best memories are the camping and canoeing trips I went on with friends," he says.

Kaine valued his friendships and helped launched SIMA (*amis*, 'friends' in French, spelled backward) with college buddy David Roloff, BA '78, M Ed '85, an MU Alumni Association staff member. "Only in the '70s could there be a campus organization with the sole mission to promote friendship," Roloff says. "Tim was one of the most good-natured, truthful and smartest friends I ever had."

What's worth fighting for?

Oregon Democratic Gov. Ted Kulongoski, elected in 2002 and currently up for

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re-election, understands younger Americans' skepticism toward politics. "I see our political process as something necessary," he says. "But in today's world, many see it as a hindrance to getting something done." A recent NBC News/*Wall Street Journal* opinion poll echoes his sentiment; 68 percent of respondents said that the majority of Congress members are not working on behalf of the American people.

"There has always been passion and dispute and conflict in politics, but historically people fought over things that were worth fighting over," Kulongoski says. "Like slavery, the role of government and federalism, a variety of issues that engendered passion, that actually moved forward the common good."

Kulongoski, BA '67, JD '70, has a passion for the common good that has kept him in the public eye for more than 30 years. Before becoming governor, he served in the Oregon House of Representatives and Senate, and as insurance commissioner, attorney general and justice on the Oregon Supreme Court. "I really thought I would retire from the Supreme Court," Kulongoski says. "The good news is, if there's a vacancy I can always appoint myself again."

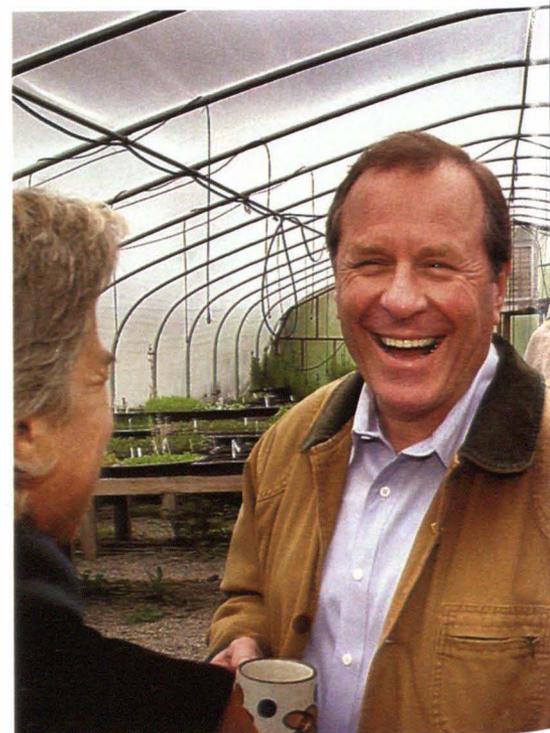
Kulongoski says education and skills training are worth fighting for now. As in many states, Oregon's public schools and universities were hard hit by the 2001–03 recession. Budget cuts shortened the school year, increased class size and curtailed aca-

demical programs. Kulongoski's Education Enterprise proposes to allocate 61 percent, up from 58 percent, of the state's general fund to education and skills training.

"The skill-training piece is critically important because not all high school students are going to go to a four-year higher education institute," he says. "People want a skill that provides them with a living wage, health care, and a vision that they will retire someday and that their kids will have greater opportunity than they did." Kulongoski, who attended MU on the GI Bill, knows the value of higher education. As a former truck driver and bricklayer, he also can appreciate the importance of job security for blue-collar workers.

Kulongoski grew up in a Catholic boys home and views the experience as different, not disadvantaged. "You deny nuns ever had any impact on your life, and then you get older and realize they had a great impact," he says. "They taught me to always be non-judgmental of others and to never forget where I came from."

Kulongoski jokes that he became a lawyer because he didn't have the grades to get



Oregon Gov. Ted Kulongoski meets farmers Kris Hoiem and Michael Moss in Hoiem's greenhouse.

into the College of Veterinary Medicine. He especially remembers economics Professor Pinkney Walker, as well as a public speaking course he took. "Sure, while in the service I could yell at Marines like crazy young guys do," he says. "But I was quite intimidated of public speaking, and I learned so much. I still remember that class while making speeches today."

The School of Law recently honored Kulongoski with the Citation of Merit Award. "His career epitomizes the way in which a Mizzou education can transform lives," says Dean Lawrence Dessem.

When Kulongoski is not traversing the state to meet with Oregonians face to face, he's traversing the mountains and rivers. "When my wife and I look at a map, there are not many places in Oregon that we haven't hiked in, fished in or driven in," he says. "I just went fly fishing on the Metolius, and it is the hardest river to catch fish on. You gotta be good. I'm not telling you what I did, only that you gotta work at it."

If only we could all spend just a little time with Kaine and Kulongoski. Their enthusiasm may be enough to convert even the most cynical. ■■



Photo by Bob Pennell of the Mail Tribune

MU graduates serve in state and federal governments

Governors Timothy Kaine, BA '79, and Ted Kulongoski, BA '67, JD '70, join an impressive group of MU graduates serving as elected officials in state or federal government.

MU graduates holding statewide offices:

- Democrat Claire McCaskill, auditor, BA '76, JD '77
- Democrat Jay Nixon, attorney general, BA '78, JD '81
- Republican Sarah Steelman, treasurer, BA '80, MA '83

MU graduates in the Missouri Senate:

- Republican Matt Bartle, BA '86, Jackson County
- Republican Dan Clemens, BS Ag '67, MS '69 Christian, Douglas and Webster counties and part of Greene County
- Republican Jason Crowell, JD '98, Perry, Madison, Bollinger, Cape Girardeau, Scott and Mississippi counties
- Republican Jack Goodman, BA '95, JD '98, Barry, Lawrence, McDonald, Ozark, Stone and Taney counties
- Republican Chuck Gross, BS PA '81, MA '82, part of St. Charles County
- Republican Chris Koster, BA '88, JD '91, Cass, Johnson, Bates and Vernon counties
- Republican Scott Rupp, BA '95, parts of St. Charles and Lincoln counties
- Republican Charlie Shields, BA '81, MA '82, Buchanan and Platte counties
- Republican William Stouffer, BS Ag '69, Carroll, Chariton, Cooper, Howard, Lafayette, Macon, Ray, Saline and part of Clay counties
- Republican Carl Vogel, BS BA '78, Callaway, Cole, Miller, Moniteau and Morgan counties

MU graduates in the Missouri House of Representatives

- Democrat Rachel Bringer, BA '92, JD '95, Marion and Ralls counties
- Republican Mike Dethrow, BS Ag '74, MS '75, Butler, Carter, Oregon, Ripley and Wayne counties
- Republican Barney Fisher, BS Ed '69, Bates and Vernon counties
- Democrat Wayne Henke, BS Ed '65, Lincoln County
- Democrat Cathy Jolly, BS '95, Jackson County
- Republican Kenneth Jones, BS Ag '72 Moniteau, Cooper, and parts of Morgan and Pettis counties
- Democrat Beth Low, BA '99, portion of Jackson County
- Republican Brian Munzlinger, BS Ag '78, Adair, Clark, Knox, Lewis, Marion, Schuyler and Scotland counties
- Republican David Pearce, BS '84, Johnson County
- Republican Bryan Pratt, BS '95, JD '99, Jackson and Lafayette counties
- Democrat Jim Whorton, BS '66, Daviess, Gentry, Grundy, Harrison, Mercer, Sullivan and Worth counties
- Republican Kevin Wilson, BS '80, McDonald and Newton counties
- Democrat Terry Witte, BS Ed '77, JD '80, Audrain, Callaway, Lincoln, Montgomery and Pike counties
- Republican Brian Yates, BA '01, JD '01, Jackson County

MU graduates in the U.S. House of Representatives

- Democrat Russ Carnahan, BS '79, JD '83, Missouri's 3rd Congressional District
- Republican Sam Graves, BS '86, Missouri's 6th District
- Republican Kenny Hulshof, BS '80, Missouri's 9th District
- Democrat Ike Skelton, BA '53, JD '56, Missouri's 4th District