

Politics

What I learned from Professor Tim Kaine

BY ROBERTA OSTER SACHS

When Tim Kaine announced his candidacy last week for the Senate, most people saw the savvy politician who had worked his way up from Richmond City Council. But I know Kaine as a teacher — a distinguished lecturer in law and leadership studies at the University of Richmond, where I serve as associate dean for external relations for the law school.

Kaine allowed me to audit his Constitutional Law class last fall, joining 30 bright and highly motivated third-year law students. I'm a journalist and a communications professional, not a law student — this was an exciting and somewhat intimidating opportunity. In his course, "The Future of Equality in American Constitutional Law," Kaine focused on the complicated issue of "equality" in our legal system, analyzing laws from the days of the adoption of our Constitution until today. At the time he was teaching, Kaine was chairman of the Democratic National Committee. He promised not to bring his politics into the classroom, and he kept his word.

We covered the thorny history of the Equal Protection Clause of the Constitution, starting with slavery, the Civil War, *Dred Scott*, and worked our way up through *Brown v. Board of Education* and other school desegregation decisions. In deconstructing equal protection, for example, we had to examine its application in the time of slavery and in the context of what Kaine called "the paradox of women's citizenship in the early republic" — a daunting task.

Once we were grounded in the constitutional and historical framework, we explored equal protection cases dealing with gay marriage, race, im-

migration, gender equality, domestic violence, wealth classifications, political participation, sexual orientation, and military service. An engaging storyteller, Kaine walked us through the contradictions and brilliance of our founding fathers and the men and women who have served on our Supreme Court. He peppered class discussions with anecdotes from his work in the trenches as a civil-rights attorney representing people who had been denied housing because of their race or disability, and from his years as mayor of Richmond and governor of Virginia.

As we unraveled the ugly and painful history of slavery, Kaine explored why equal protection for all is a core value for Americans. I now understood how this applies to modern debates over issues such as affirmative action. I also realized that today's debates about the rights of immigrants have long and convoluted antecedents.

Kaine listened patiently as students from across the political spectrum defended their ideas. He asked a lot of questions and treated his students as colleagues, valuing their

opinions and encouraging them to be true to their own convictions. He also urged Richmond Law students to consider careers in public service and shared his story about the choices he made after graduating from Harvard Law School.

With all of Kaine's connections and that law-school degree, he could have earned millions in the private sector. Instead, he chose public service. He told us about the year he took off during law school to volunteer with Jesuit missionaries in Honduras at a vocational school for teenage boys — that experience, he said, inspired him to focus his career on public service. He has spent the past 31 years doing just that.

In my 20 years as a network news producer, I interviewed many politicians and covered countless congressional races, and I'm well aware that the candidate on the stump faces inevitable changes when he or she moves to Capitol Hill. For now, Kaine's sharp mind and sophisticated political skills are still tempered by an "aw-shucks," boy-next-door warmth that is rare in Washington.



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

I learned a lot about Kaine when I joined a group of undergraduate students at an end-of-semester Sunday brunch at his home. He stood on his front porch in his worn checked summer shirt beckoning, "Come on in and make yourselves at home." Then he moved to the kitchen to make iced tea in plastic jugs, while his wife, Anne Holton, a Harvard Law School classmate and former judge, prepared platters of hot dogs and sandwiches. Together, they put the fixings on their dining room table and set a charming collection of mismatched chairs around the living room.

After lunch Kaine glanced at his watch and announced, "I need to meet with my students to check on their summer job prospects." He excused himself and pulled the chairs into a conversation circle. Then he asked each student to share their summer plans. He dispensed some street-smart advice, and generously offered to write letters and make calls for those who needed a helping hand to find a summer job.

One student told me she couldn't believe Kaine was, "so helpful and approachable." She said she was surprised that a former governor would be so real and generous with his time. I heard the same feedback from Richmond School of Law students who have asked Kaine to keynote many of their events and write countless letters of recommendation.

If, like Hollywood's Mr. Smith, Mr. Kaine goes to Washington as a Virginia senator, I can't imagine he could hold on to every folksy and endearing quality he now has, but I'm hoping he'll hold on to some things — including those mismatched chairs.

Roberta Oster Sachs is associate dean for external relations at the University of Richmond School of Law. Contact her at rsachs@richmond.edu.

Equal pay day

Daughters, meet the albatross

BY RUTA SEVO

The international community has long recognized that economic development and quality of life hinge on the education and participation of women in work. The education of girls and employment of women are indicators of economic progress, in the U.N. Millennium Goals, because they have one of the highest returns on investment.

The good news is that American women are now going to college at the highest rate in U.S. history. In fact, women earn 57 percent of all bachelor's degrees and just under half of all Ph.Ds. They are preparing for jobs that can support a family, because they realize that they will need to do just that.

At the same time, women still spend more hours in a week parenting and doing housework. There is a greater burden on women to sustain families, due to the lag in changing gender roles at home, family-friendly work policies and providing adequate support for universal, convenient and quality child care. Other developed countries have moved faster in making these kinds of changes.

The albatross is the demoralizing effect of realizing that in spite of an equal education for women, the chances for equal pay don't follow. At every education level, women continue to earn less than similarly educated men. Even one year out of college, there is a pay gap of 5 percent.

It's not only the insult of realizing that because of physical characteristics, a girl's wages are "shorted" while her male pals prosper. The cumulative effect of that shortage is estimated to be more than \$200,000 in the course of a working life. This is significant, especially in light of longer lives and the corresponding greater need for retirement savings. We, in America, value economic independence, self-reliance and wealth. It's in society's interest that more women improve their financial security. Let's give women (married, single, divorced or widowed) an equal chance at it.

We could have a system that used other arbitrary physical characteristics to determine relative pay — say, the amount of hair on your head. Traditions like discrimination against women in the workplace are usually based on misinformation. For example, a century ago it was claimed that educating women would cause their reproductive organs to atrophy. We still have people believing that female brains are not suited for complexity and work — ironically argued, in some cases, by women with substantial educations.

It's time to cast off the assumption that women don't need the money.

Women are half of the workforce now. They are the sole breadwinners in 39 percent of families, and partners in household income in another 24 percent of American families. The current recession magnifies the critical role of women's salaries in sustaining families. Only one in five families has a stay-at-home mother and a breadwinner father. Yet, our government policies are still rooted in the fundamental assumption that families rely on a single male breadwinner.

We need the Paycheck Fairness Act, a bill that addresses persisting discriminatory practices. There are loopholes and provisions in existing law that need to be closed. Whole generations of daughters, and half of our working population, are still wearing the albatross.

Let's set that albatross free! Let's do right by our daughters and support equal pay and the Paycheck Fairness Act.

Ruta Sevo is an independent consultant and a member of the American Association of University Women. Contact her at ruta@momox.org.