

## **Warner makes his candidacy official**

He is seeking the Senate seat in the Nov. 4 election

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Former governor Mark Warner announced his bid for U.S. Senate to a crowd of 150 people Tuesday morning in Martinsville, promising to work across party lines to tackle gas prices, health care and troop withdrawal from Iraq.

The event at Main Street Restaurant was part of a three-day, nine-city kickoff for Warner's campaign that started Sunday in Abingdon.

"The problems we face are not left versus right, Republican versus Democrat. It's critical that we find common ground," Warner said Tuesday, adding that if elected, he wants to build a bipartisan group of 10 to 12 senators called the "Radical Centrists."

Warner is running in the Nov. 4 election against the Republican candidate — either former governor Jim Gilmore or Del. Bob Marshall. The election is for the Senate seat now held by retiring Sen. John Warner, R-Va., who is not related to Mark Warner.

Warner said if elected, he will help Henry County and Martinsville by moving forward on construction of Interstate 73 and securing federal support for retraining workers.

"We need a world-class, educated work force" to compete in the global economy, he said.

Times are getting tougher, he said of the economy, but he peppered his speech with optimism for the future.

"This is a community that for most of the 20th century carried the rest of Virginia on its back," he said. "We've still got a ways to go, but I think we've turned the corner."

To lower fuel costs, Warner urged breaking the country's "addiction to foreign oil" and exploring alternative energy sources, "but not corn-based ethanol, which just drives up food prices," he said during the speech.

When asked about the proposed "gas tax holiday" that would suspend the 18.4-cent federal gas tax from Memorial Day to Labor Day, Warner said, "I'm concerned that oil companies wouldn't pass the profits on to the public, and that would take \$10 billion in revenue away from our roads."

Instead, he said he supports going after “oil speculators who are driving up the price of oil.”

Warner also advocated lowering the cost of prescription drugs and providing health benefits packages that everyone can afford.

“We need to fix health care, not only because it’s right, but because our health care costs two times as much as the rest of the world,” he said.

Also, he said, “It’s a disgrace that this country doesn’t do a better job providing world-class health care to our wounded veterans.”

As in previous campaign stops, Warner called for a “plan to draw troops down in a way that doesn’t leave Iraq a haven for terrorists.”

Del. Ward Armstrong, D-Collinsville, spoke first. He praised Warner for his many visits to Henry County and Martinsville and for addressing the needs of laid-off workers during his time as Virginia’s governor from 2002 to January 2006.

While in office, Warner visited the area numerous times for plant closings as well as openings.

“We need a senator who cares about all regions of Virginia, not just the more populated areas,” Armstrong said.

Armstrong and Martinsville Mayor Kimble Reynolds Jr. remembered Warner standing in the pouring rain in Fieldale talking to workers who lost their jobs when the Pillowtex plant closed in 2003.

Sen. Roscoe Reynolds, D-Ridgeway, and city Sheriff Steve Draper also spoke glowingly of Warner’s record.

“During his four years, there were 34 announcements of expansions, new jobs coming to Martinsville and Henry County,” Sen. Reynolds said. “When fully implemented, there will be 3,500 jobs in Martinsville/Henry County that weren’t there before his administration.”

Warner also was introduced by Eric Penn, a student earning his bachelor’s in business administration degree at the New College Institute (NCI). Penn called his experience at NCI “very positive” and praised the school for giving working adults with families a chance to further their educations.

“Because of (Warner), citizens in our community have the opportunity to complete four-year degrees through a variety of institutions,” Penn said.

As governor, Warner and the General Assembly committed more than \$1 million for planning NCI.

Warner talked about his challenges and successes in office.

“I came into office and inherited a budget shortfall that was four times more than my predecessor said it was,” he said. “It eventually turned into a \$6 billion deficit. We had to make a lot of hard choices.”

But with bipartisan support, spending cuts and tax reforms, Warner said, his administration and legislators “cleaned up the mess left behind by Gilmore,” leading *Governing* magazine to name Virginia the “best-managed state in the country” in 2004.

During his tenure, the Virginia Health Care Foundation was created and helped half a million uninsured citizens get health care, Warner said. The Kaiser Family Foundation recognized the commonwealth for extending coverage to almost 140,000 additional children.