

## Letters to the Editor: Rep. Cline's fake bipartisanship

Niro Rasanayagam

March 6, 2019

U.S. Rep. Ben Cline held a town hall in Lynchburg last month, as reported in Friday's News & Advance, which I attended. Cline, R-Sixth District, opened the meeting by acknowledging he won Lynchburg City in November's election by only 400 votes and that his opponent almost beat him here. As a result he said, he was having one of his first townhalls take place here as a way to reach out to "the other side," to hear the concerns of those who did not vote for him and that he wants to represent all his constituents in the U.S. House.

I was encouraged by this bipartisan talk for about 10 minutes until his soliloquy ended. Then, the Q&A began with constituents and, aided by a room mostly full of his supporters, Cline wasted no time in spreading misinformation and took every opportunity to lob political potshots against Democrats. I was disappointed as I had optimistically believed Rep. Cline, being among a friendly crowd, would take this opportunity to clarify on points of untruths that were swirling around the room among his supporters. Instead, Cline laid down in that mud and gleefully wallowed in it with them.

First, stop with the immigrant bashing. The rates of crime among each of the undocumented and documented immigrant groups are lower than the rates of crime committed by native-born Americans. This fact has been well-researched and supported by numerous studies, and even most notably by the conservative Cato Institute. Second, undocumented and documented immigrants are not a drag on the welfare system, and in fact pay taxes (despite being undocumented in many cases!) and pay far more into our system than take out of it. It is a well-known fact that immigration has been a pillar of economic development for our nation, time and again.

Third, despite being asked repeatedly at the meeting, Cline was unable to provide a clear answer for why he is against background checks for private gun sales. More than 90 percent of Americans support universal background checks on gun sales and yet Cline refuses to engage on this topic, dismissing it as "infringing on [Second Amendment] rights." Cline refused to answer the question of how he would prevent the mentally ill from accessing handguns and what safe gun laws entail for him. Being dismissive and evasive on this important topic, Cline is showing his cards as a right-of-Trump partisan, not a problem solver.

Fourth, Cline professed his concern for the budget and our soaring national debt. I did want that on the record so that we, his constituents, can keep him accountable to it.

Finally, Cline made several tired and uncalled for barbs against Speaker Nancy Pelosi and other Democrats, fanning the delight of his right-wing supporters gathered there. Sir, these are cheap thrills for your base, but clearly unproductive for engaging with the vast political middle of your district on solving the real problems facing us.

Niro Rasanayagam, Lynchburg

