

# Richmond Times-Dispatch

## Will Virginia Republicans fall for Trump Mini-me?

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Politicians often wrap themselves in the American flag — that’s to be expected. But the Confederate one?

Corey Stewart, GOP candidate for governor of Virginia, has made the Stars and Bars his unofficial banner. The move qualifies as the most curious of his campaign, but it’s far from the only odd one.

Stewart has railed against “politically correct” efforts to move Confederate statuary from their places of honor, and denounced those who would do so as “tyrants.” Last week he slammed his primary opponent, Ed Gillespie, for alleged squishiness on the subject — in an ad titled “Lee Jackson Courage.” By gad, sir. Just ... by gad.

Why Stewart — who was born in the great Confederate state of Minnesota — pursues such a digression into the past remains a bit of a mystery. He has said he was “Trump before Trump was Trump,” and is plainly trying to mimic The Donald’s campaign strategy, right down to the cutesy name-calling (Stewart refers to Gillespie as “Establishment Ed”).

This conceivably might earn him the Republican nomination in the June primary. But that’s not looking too good for him right now: Gillespie’s lead over Stewart has remained steady, measuring 26 points in February and 27 points just a few days ago.

Granted, Trump’s presidential victory and Dave Brat’s upset over Eric Cantor offer two reminders about the peril of political predictions. But were Stewart to win the primary, he likely would get slaughtered in the general election. Unlike Brat’s district, the whole of Virginia is not gerrymandered. And Trump, who started out with far better name recognition than Stewart could ever dream of, still lost Virginia by more than 200,000 votes.

Stewart also has adopted Trump's casual relationship to the truth.

The ad about Confederate statuary features a fake-news headline altered to look as if it appeared in The Washington Post, which it didn't.

Stewart claims to have received 130 endorsements from faith leaders. But the Daily Press reports that the list includes "a reporter who asked repeatedly not to be included, a Christopher Newport student who now has 'second thoughts' and a Newport News man who's not 100 percent decided." The Stewart campaign evidently was not interested in helping to clear up any confusion.

Stewart also makes dubious claims about his prowess as a crime-fighter. He continues to assert that he is responsible for a 48.7 percent drop in crime in Prince William, where he is chairman of the Board of Supervisors. But Politifact debunked that claim three years ago: The actual decrease was less than half that, and little different from the statewide average. (Oh, and recently murders in Prince William have doubled. No word from Stewart taking credit there.)

Stewart attributes the drop in crime to his get-tough policy on illegal aliens. In an email blast last week, he said Prince William's crime-fighting success was "a direct result of our crackdown on illegal immigration." Which is nonsense.

For one thing, there is no evidence to support the claim. A drop in crime might have coincided with the immigration crackdown — but then so did many other things, including Barack Obama's march to the presidency, Kosovo's declaration of independence from Serbia, and the first democratic elections in Bhutan. Coincidence isn't causation.

More to the point, research by The Sentencing Project and the Cato Institute shows that immigrants, both legal and illegal, commit crime at lower rates than native-born Americans.

"If native-born Americans were incarcerated at the same rate as illegal immigrants," the Cato study finds, "about 893,000 fewer natives would be incarcerated." This suggests that, if the Prince William immigration crackdown really did drive undocumented aliens to leave, it probably pushed crime rates higher, not lower.

Finally, Stewart mimics Trump's alpha-male schtick. "I am the only candidate who has the guts to stand up to the left," he declares. He vows to make Virginia "the toughest on illegal alien crime," he has called the mayor of Richmond a "coward," and he recently called Gillespie a "cuckservative." The term is favored by the alt-right and implies not only that someone is a traitor to his creed but weak and effeminate as well.

This is the false bravado of the barroom loudmouth. True courage — think Dietrich Bonhoeffer, think Chesty Puller, think Marcus Luttrell, think Aung San Suu Kyi — does not need to proclaim itself, and most people can tell the difference between true courage and empty swagger. We'll see if Republicans can come June.

