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ACLU of Virginia: Willis departs

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American politics increasingly are characterized by red-team/blue-team rivalry: Witness the recent effort to remake the Cato Institute into another Republican cheerleading team. Groups that stand for principles rather than parties are lamentably rare.

To its credit, the ACLU has resisted the trend. We haven't agreed with the ACLU on every issue and are saddened by its tergiversations on the contraception mandate. But the group is hardly the gang of knee-jerk liberals of conservative myth. In fact, its firm support for free expression sometimes has dismayed the more radical elements of the American left, which view free speech as a tool of oppression.

The Virginia ACLU often has served as the tip of the spear in the battle against censorship and for civil liberties. And for nearly a quarter-century, its powerful voice has been strengthened by the leadership of Kent Willis, who announced recently that he is stepping down. He is doing so, he says, not because he is being pushed or pulled; it's simply time for someone else to take a turn at the helm.

That modest and principled stance — one might even go so far as to call it Washingtonian — reflects well on an organization that has ably served the commonwealth despite the many brickbats that have been flung at it. Willis will leave the group bigger and stronger than he found it, for which all Virginians should be grateful.