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Warner visits Petersburg, praises nonprofit work

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PETERSBURG — Former Gov. Mark R. Warner was in the city Tuesday to laud The Phoenix Project — and to do a little campaigning.

“Everybody working together is critical to addressing the challenges ahead,” Warner said at The Phoenix Project’s community coffee at Tabernacle Baptist Church’s Community Life Center. He added that cooperation is what the Phoenix Project is all about, bringing nonprofit organizations together for the benefit of the community. Nonprofits are well-known for not working well with one another, he said.

In its mission statement, The Phoenix Project says it “seeks to alleviate poverty by building a sustainable partnership between Virginia higher education and the Commonwealth’s most distressed communities that adds civic capacity to communities, strengthens the mission of universities and provides a powerful context in which to prepare nonprofit and social entrepreneurs for tomorrow’s Virginia.”



MANDANA MARSH/STAFF PHOTO Former Gov. Mark Warner speaks to area leaders on issues including education, job training and energy resources yesterday. The Phoenix Project hosted the community meeting at Tabernacle Baptist Church’s Community Life Center

“I challenge you in the nonprofit world to work together more often. So often, everybody has their own initiatives,” Warner said. He added that many nonprofits also only seem to have a hand-to-mouth ability — raising money and then using it to expand without first building capacity.

Greg Werkheiser, executive director of The Phoenix Project, said the project has engaged more than 350 university students, faculty and staff in 150 projects that have improved the ability of municipal agencies and nonprofit organizations to help people.

“That’s been \$2.5 million worth of labor at no cost to the city,” Werkheiser said.

Some of those projects have included the development of a new Web site to publicize Petersburg commercial activities more effectively, assisting the Legal Aid Justice Center in representing clients in landlord-tenant cases, completing home repairs in the Birdville neighborhood and engaging in marketing and volunteer-recruitment efforts to increase the capacity of the Tri-Cities Literacy Council.

Besides praising The Phoenix Project and its work in Petersburg, Warner made some statements about his “job application process,” for the U.S. Senate.

Warner is running a campaign seeking the seat of five-term Republican Sen. John Warner, who announced on Aug. 31 that he would not seek re-election this fall.

Before being elected governor in 2001, Mark Warner challenged John Warner for his Senate seat in 1996 and lost a narrow contest that went down to the wire.

“I wouldn’t be running if he was still seeking the seat,” former Gov. Warner said. “I hope that if I am elected I can create in the Senate a group of radical centrists. I’m a Democrat, but I don’t think the people in America trust either political party.”

Warner said his goal would be to find senators from both major political parties to push policies and legislation that would benefit the country as a whole. He added that the legislation on which he would be focusing would concentrate on four areas — alternative energy, competitive reform to education and health care, infrastructure and national security.

“We need to be the good guys again,” Warner said. “We need to return to traditional foreign policy.”

Warner said he would like to see the economy strengthened so the country isn't relying on foreign oil and alienating former allies on other policies.

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