

Legislative Update – May, 2012

It has been an honor serving the citizens of the 64th District for the last five months. I have thoroughly enjoyed spending time with you at each of the delegate hours in Isle of Wight, Prince George, Southampton, Surry, Sussex, and cities of Franklin and Suffolk. Thank you for allowing me to share legislative updates with you while listening to your concerns and providing information to you.

2012 Legislative Report Card

The Legislative Report Card recognizes legislators for their supporting initiatives that will help move Virginia forward and additionally provide him with support for their respective business community priorities. With the help of Virginia's pro-business legislators, the Virginia Chamber of Commerce was successful on 90% of its legislative priorities during the 2012 session and saved employers over \$120 million by opposing anti-business legislation.

The Virginia Chamber of Commerce **awarded me an "A" rating** for sponsoring and voting for pro-legislation during the 2012 General Assembly session. As stated by Barry DuVal, President and CEO of the Virginia Chamber, "The Legislative Report Card allows us to recognize and honor legislators who uphold free market principles and support the interests of the business community."

While I am honored to have received such a high rating from the Virginia Chamber of Commerce, I am especially pleased Virginia is recognized as **THE MOST BUSINESS FRIENDLY STATE IN OUR COUNTRY.**

My First Bill Was Signed by Governor McDonnell

When Delegates and Senators returned to Richmond for a special budget session, one major highlight was Governor Bob McDonnell ceremonially signing my bill. HB 630 (Racketeering Forfeiture) which allows funds from criminal investments in racketeering operations to be forfeited so criminals don't profit from their crimes.

Serving on the committees of the Courts of Justice Committee, the Counties, Cities and Towns Committee, and the Militia, Police and Public Safety Committee, I strive to create economic development and opportunities in the 64th District.

The Department of Forensic Science

I was recently appointed to the Department of Forensic Science Board. The Department of Forensic Science is a nationally accredited forensic laboratory system serving all state and local law enforcement agencies, medical examiners, and Commonwealth's Attorneys in Virginia. Forensic examiners provide technical assistance and training, evaluate and analyze evidence, interpret results, and provide expert testimony related to the full spectrum of physical evidence recovered from crime scenes.

Governor McDonnell Touts Economic Development and Job Creation Efforts across the Commonwealth

A new television ad from Opportunity Virginia Political Action Committee (PAC) highlighted Virginia's business and economic development achievements over the last two years. Opportunity Virginia PAC recently released a new television ad. Fellow Virginians and business owners share the stories of their respective businesses and discuss how our pro-growth, anti-regulation philosophy in Virginia has helped them thrive in their chosen fields.

The ad follows last week's announcement that the March 2012 unemployment rate in Virginia fell to 5.6 percent, down substantially from the Commonwealth's peak unemployment rate of 7.2 percent in January 2010. With the national unemployment rate hovering at 8.2 percent, Virginia's unemployment rate ranks ninth in the nation and the lowest in the southeast.

Virginia continues to outperform the nation as a whole in terms of economic vitality and job creation. This ad perfectly captures that story from the perspective of Virginia's entrepreneurs and innovators. Policies have been put in place that allows these creative people to succeed in their respective ventures. The hope is that citizens and leaders across the Commonwealth who have an opportunity to see this ad will reflect on our successes over the last two years.

Fourth Consecutive Monthly Decrease in Virginia Unemployment Rate

Virginia's unemployment rate has declined for the fourth straight month. The unemployment rate for the month of March was 5.6 percent. That is the lowest unemployment rate in Virginia in over 3 years, and a decline from 5.7 percent in February. Virginia has the lowest unemployment rate in the Southeast, and the third-lowest unemployment rate east of the Mississippi River. The national unemployment rate for March was 8.2 percent.

At 5.6 percent our unemployment rate is far below the national unemployment rate. We have the lowest unemployment rate in the southeastern United States and we have fallen far below the 7.3 percent unemployment rate we inherited when taking office in January 2010. All of this means: more Virginians are working today. That is a great thing. Virginia's economy is recovering, but it is still early. Too many Virginians still need good jobs.

Virginia Aviation and Space Workforce Analysis and Strategy Development Report Published

The most recent *Aviation and Space Workforce Development Analysis and Strategy Development* report highlights the aviation and space industries' current employment levels and future projections for growth. According to the report, approximately 12,000 new employees will be required to fill positions that include airline pilots, aircraft mechanics and technicians, aerospace engineers, mechanical

engineers, air traffic controllers and other technical jobs that require strong science, engineering, technology and mathematics (STEM) skills.

Additional goals are to enhance interest in STEM-related careers by focusing on the educational pipeline and include secondary education, increase industry visibility through promotional and marketing efforts, develop a statewide strategic plan mentorship programs to transfer institutional knowledge from the senior generation to the younger generation of the workforce as well as place former military personnel with defense contractors.

Implementation of the recommendations will be executed as a joint effort between the Department of Aviation, the Virginia Department of Education, and aviation and space industry partners. The Virginia Department of Education and the Virginia Community College System identified several existing programs that support the recommendations and provided guidance on developing programs that strengthen STEM-related skills.

Higher Education Package Provides \$230 Million in New State Funds for Higher Education

Following General Assembly passage of a biennial budget that provides over \$230 million in new funding for Virginia's higher education system, we are urging college presidents and boards to voluntarily endeavor to keep in-state tuition increases for the upcoming fall semester and beyond to the annual increase in the Consumer Price Index. The average in-state tuition increase for the 2011-2012 school year in Virginia was 9.7%. The Consumer Price Index for the last 12 months, non-seasonally adjusted, was 2.7%. Virginia's colleges and universities are currently determining tuition rates for the upcoming school year. Already the University of Virginia has announced a tuition increase of 3.7%, the lowest increase since 2001-2002.

Constitutional Amendment – Property Rights

In 2005, Supreme Court in *Kelo v. New London* upheld the right of governments to take private property for economic development projects. In response, the Virginia General Assembly has passed a measure that would make it harder for government to seize property by eminent domain. The eminent domain reform amendment is needed because there have already been legislative attempts to chip away at the current statutes. The amendment more strictly defines the term "public use" and establishes that "just compensation includes compensation for demonstrable lost profits and lost access. In order to amend the Virginia Constitution, the proposed amendment must pass the General Assembly twice, with an election in between, and then must be approved by Virginia voters through a referendum. This property rights amendment will be on the November ballot.

General Assembly Passes 2012 – 2014 Biennial Budget

The House of Delegates passed the final amendments to the 2010-12 biennial budget, House Bill 1300, on a vote of 80-16 and the upcoming 2012-14 biennial budget,

House Bill 1301, on vote of 77-19. The Senate approved the upcoming biennial budget on a vote of 21-19 late Wednesday afternoon.

The budget is responsible, fiscally sound and reflects the priorities of not only our Caucus, but the entire General Assembly. These priority investments include \$122 million to moderate tuition costs in Virginia's public colleges and universities, a \$110 million block grant for K-12 education, over \$44 million to restore the health care safety net, funding for 305 new Medicaid waiver slots and various economic incentives that will energize our entrepreneurs and create jobs across Virginia.

The budget will serve well the citizens of the Commonwealth.

2012 State Budget

This budget makes historic investments in our higher education system so more Virginia students can access and afford our great colleges and universities. It reduces unfunded liabilities in our retirement system by nearly \$9 billion by 2031, an historic achievement that ensures our dedicated state employees will receive the retirements they have been counting on. The budget combines accountability and innovation with over half a billion dollars in new funding for our K-12 system. And this budget provides fiscal liquidity and stability for Virginia as we continue to navigate a very uncertain economy. There are no tax increases in this budget. This is a budget that ensures Virginia's state government will live within its means, like our families and businesses do every day.

Virginia's economy is growing strong again. Unemployment is at an over three-year low, and the lowest in the Southeast. Agricultural exports are at record levels. More Virginians are working today. As this recovery continues Richmond has an important role to play. We must pass policies that spur private-sector job creation, and ensure that taxation, regulation and litigation remain at a minimum. That is how we will grow this economy. In this effort we are united by factors far bigger than party or region. With today's vote, we again followed 'The Virginia Way'.

Contact:

Please contact me to speak at your organization or group. I can be reached by phone at (757) 912-1644, by email at delrmorris@house.virginia.gov, or on my website at www.delrickmorris.com. Check my website calendar page for information regarding in-district office hours and town hall meetings in Prince George County, Surry, Southampton, Town of Smithfield and City of Franklin. Please continue to keep me updated on issues that are important to you and your family.