

Week 3 Update - House Advances K-12 Reform Bills as Our Economy Improves

This week in Richmond included a second round of snow in as many weeks, but the light dustings have not been enough to stop progress in the House of Delegates.

Virginia's Unemployment Rate Falls to 5.5% - Lowest in the Southeast

I start this week's update with some great news on Virginia's economy. Last Friday, it was announced that Virginia's unemployment rate fell to 5.5%- the lowest unemployment rate since 2008 and the lowest in the Southeast. Working in partnership with Governor McDonnell, Republican Delegates have made creating a positive, pro-growth jobs environment our top priority. Our formula for increasing economic growth has consisted of keeping taxes low, eliminating unnecessary regulations, and developing a skilled and educated workforce. This 4 year low unemployment rate is the result of our efforts to help create new jobs and opportunities.

This good economic news does not mean we have taken our eye off the ball. Helping businesses create new jobs and improving our economy remains our highest priority. This year, we have advanced solutions to reduce traffic congestion, remove bureaucratic red tape, and improve our education system to ensure our children can compete for the jobs of tomorrow.

House Republicans Advance K-12 Education Reform Agenda

One of the key ingredients to a strong economy is a well-educated workforce, my Republican colleagues and I are committed to advancing reforms that empower our teachers, bring greater accountability to our schools, and give localities more flexibility over state funding.

This week, the House of Delegates passed several important K-12 education reform bills.

- **The Teach for America Act (HB 2084)** passed the House of Delegates with unanimous support. This bill will bring the Teach for America program to the Commonwealth and allow participants in the program to teach in Virginia schools. Currently, 300 of Virginia's best and brightest recent college graduates who participate in Teach for America are sent to classrooms in other states. This bill will allow these individuals, along with any other Teach

for America participant, to teach here and work to make a difference in our schools.

Teach for America recruits are often in the top 10 percent of their college classes or hold student leadership positions. Before they start teaching in the classrooms, they must pass an intensive training course that involves practice in a classroom setting, community integration, and professional development.

- **Local School Division Charter School Approval (HB 2076)** would reduce barriers to creating charter schools in Virginia.
- **High School to Work Partnerships (HB 2101)** passed with unanimous support. This bill will make sure all high school graduates are college or career ready when they graduate.
- **The Educator Fairness Act (HB 2151)** passed with solid bipartisan support. This legislation gives localities the option to extend the probationary window for new teachers from three to five years and clarifies the evaluation and grievance processes for teachers. This legislation has the support from many groups including the Virginia Chamber of Commerce, the Virginia Association of Superintendents and the Virginia Education Association.

Rewarding Our Teachers – An Update on the 2% Pay Raise

House Republicans also remain committed to rewarding our hardworking teachers with a 2% pay raise. After the initial announcement of the pay raise proposal, many localities raised two concerns that could prevent them from being able to offer the raise to their teachers. I fully understand these issues, and my colleagues and I are working hard to find solutions to ensure our teachers get the pay raise they deserve.

The first issue for many localities is the teacher pay raise proposal does not include funding for pay raises for the support staff- the bus drivers, secretaries, and other staff members who work to keep our schools running. As many localities have a policy that requires them to give pay raises to all school employees, these localities would have been required to pay the full cost of a pay raise for the support staff under the original pay raise plan. However, the House Appropriations Committee is working to find funding to provide the state share of funding for the pay raise for support staff in the House budget.

The second issue localities highlighted was their need for additional time to provide their share of funding for the teacher pay raise. As teachers are local employees, localities must cover a portion of the funding needed for any pay raises on top of the state's funding. The original proposal required localities to give the pay raise by July 1, 2014, but many localities voiced concern that they would not have enough time to find the local funding needed for the pay raise. To solve this problem, the House Appropriations Committee will propose language in the House budget to extend the window for localities to give the pay raise.

More information on the teacher pay raise, along with many other proposals, will be coming out soon as we continue our work on the House budget.

Bills and Resolutions

HB 1320-Extends the \$0.30 per 100 pounds excise tax on all peanuts grown in and sold in Virginia until July 1, 2016. The proceeds from the tax will be used for promoting the sales and use of Virginia peanuts. Unanimously reported from the Agriculture, Chesapeake, and Natural Resources committee and passed the full House by a vote of 87-0. It now heads to the Senate for consideration.

HB 1929- Authorizes the chief law-enforcement officer of a city or town to report to the Director of the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries that deer are creating a traffic hazard in the jurisdiction. If after an investigation the Director finds that such a hazard exists, he may authorize responsible persons, or their representatives, to kill the deer. Unanimously reported by the Agriculture, Chesapeake, and Natural Resources committee and passed the full House by a vote of 87-0. It now heads to the Senate for consideration.

Contact Me

As always, my staff and I are here in Richmond to serve you. We want to hear what you think about the legislation pending before the House, or if there's anything we can do to help you in dealing with a state government agency. My office can be reached at (804) 698-1064 or via the Internet at DelRMorris@house.virginia.gov. Please take my Citizen Survey:

<http://survey.house.virginia.gov/Survey.aspx?surveyid=2829>. If you are planning to visit Richmond during Session, I encourage you to visit me in Room 817.

Thank you again for allowing me to serve as your Delegate.

Links of Interest

Governor's Transportation Plan

Governor McDonnell Visits Newport News to Highlight Positive Local Impact of Passing Comprehensive Transportation Plan:

<http://www.governor.virginia.gov/News/viewRelease.cfm?id=1627>

Governor McDonnell Visits Fairfax to Highlight Positive Local Impact of Passing Comprehensive Transportation Plan:

<http://www.governor.virginia.gov/News/viewRelease.cfm?id=1626>

Governor McDonnell Highlights Positive Local Impact of Passing Comprehensive Transportation Plan for Roanoke:

<http://www.governor.virginia.gov/News/viewRelease.cfm?id=1625>

Delegate Yancey Point of Personal Privilege on Transportation:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1_dyhKGIbEs

Luck Companies and the Virginia Economic Developers Association Announce Support for Governor McDonnell's Transportation Plan:

<http://www.governor.virginia.gov/News/viewRelease.cfm?id=1623>

McDonnell Releases Proposed Transportation Project List for "Virginia's Road to the Future":

<http://www.governor.virginia.gov/News/viewRelease.cfm?id=1622>

K-12 Education Reform

House of Delegates Passes Key K-12 Education Initiatives:

http://r20.rs6.net/tn.jsp?e=001F1o4ORPZ_lrVLxZRPabz0W7mg4iGUgopeeeIIX0hnG3SimaeDvddWBdC3Sz2zS79xkd3IYEE0Qy5sNWEX58npQGiMjvnavy1aCrzwCpkT0Z6aoYD373K3cwFBJ5M5_YjJaPHVkeyqatk1P0-CHf3F4-B9NSmYIJB2rjiFjnmB0-rxuce0IukmXgeZg5b7lX

House GOP Caucus Release on Education Reforms:

<http://www.vahousegop.com/?p=1594>

Delegate Cox Point of Personal Privilege on K-12 Education Reforms:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i0k0xGQ4k3U>

Delegate Cox Op-Ed on Teacher Reforms in the K-12 Education Agenda:

http://www.timesdispatch.com/opinion/their-opinion/columnists-blogs/guest-columnists/cox-teachers-are-key-to-reforming-virginia-education-system/article_d12aaa82-d45d-5323-b643-e05a165ab955.html

All Students Intro Video:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wsiPleBjilY>

Jobs & Economy

Delegate Watson Point of Personal Privilege on Jobs:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nwBKuhl6Dp8>

Statement of Governor Bob McDonnell on Lowest Virginia Unemployment Rate Since December 2008:

<http://www.governor.virginia.gov/News/viewRelease.cfm?id=1616>

Miscellaneous

Virginia Improves to Top State for New LEED Certifications in 2012:

<http://www.governor.virginia.gov/News/viewRelease.cfm?id=1624>

Statement of Governor Bob McDonnell on the Inauguration of President Barack Obama:

<http://www.governor.virginia.gov/News/viewRelease.cfm?id=1621>

Governor McDonnell Issues Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Proclamation:

<http://www.governor.virginia.gov/News/viewRelease.cfm?id=1620>