

March 3, 2008

Dear Neighbor:

As someone who has expressed an interest in this year's General Assembly session, I am writing to relate to you some items of importance to Virginia Beach and the Commonwealth as a whole.

During the 2008 session we faced one of the most challenging fiscal situations and uncertain economic climates of this decade. In spite of that, the House of Delegates has approved by an overwhelming 93-5 bi-partisan vote a spending plan for the next two years that fulfills our responsibilities and provides for Virginia's future. We could have taken a different course and raised taxes and fees, but we knew that Virginia's families did not need us to follow that course in these tight fiscal times.

Accordingly, the House rejected the Governor's nearly \$70 million in additional cuts to higher education. Working to maintain funding levels for our state-supported colleges and universities was a key emphasis of the delegates, as we know that reductions in funding are often accompanied by steep increases in tuition.

The House budget provides \$13 billion in funding for public education in the fiscal years 2009-2010 (the biennium), which is \$193 million more than the introduced budget of \$12.8 billion and \$68 million than the Senate budget. Increasing spending for K-12 public schools by \$1.1 billion over the 2006-2008 biennial budget, the House plan pays teachers more and makes more funds available for school construction. For its share, Virginia Beach will receive approximately \$790 million in education funding, \$11 million more than the Governor's revised budget and \$5 million more than the Senate budget. Of this, the House budget provides the state's share of a 2 percent pay raise for school teachers in the first year of the budget (fiscal year 2009).

The House budget does make a change to the methodology for recalculating the cost of re-benchmarking funding for public education. The change permits the General Assembly to apply sound fiscal management principles to the process of funding public education and fulfills its obligation to public education as specified in the Constitution of Virginia and the Virginia Code. We are only re-benchmarking those expenses that are funded in the Standards of Quality; consequently those extra expenses and hires that local school divisions take on, beyond those required in the Standards of Quality, will not be calculated in the re-benchmarking in future years unless we redo the formula. It is my guess that the new formula, if it lasts through this session, will be revised in the near future.

Even in difficult financial times, it is important to reward our state workers. Accordingly we have identified dollars to provide for a 2 percent raise for state employees, college faculty and state-supported local employees in the first year.

As you may realize, the House and the Senate budgets differ at this point. A committee of conferees from both bodies is working hard to craft a compromise budget, which then must be signed by the Governor before going into effect.

Of the fourteen bills that I successfully sponsored this year as the chief patron, there are four that I would like to highlight. House Bill 3 creates a Screened Family Day Home Provider List to enhance the safety of children who are in certain day care situations that are unlicensed and unregulated by the state (i.e. providers who care for five or less children unrelated to them). Providers of such day care may join a registry after undergoing record checks and background checks. I was also the chief patron of House Bill 4, to allow a consumer to freeze access to his credit report. My bill, along with several others, was rolled into House Bill 1311 and that bill subsequently was approved unanimously by both bodies. A third measure that I introduced is House Bill 2. This will eliminate the one-time surcharge imposed for issuance of special license plates for immediate family members of persons who have died in military service to their country. In a small manner, this is one way that the Commonwealth can show its appreciation for these sacrifices.

I also sponsored House Bill 766 at the request of the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia. This measure will clamp down on entities that issue fraudulent academic credentials, better know as "diploma mills," plus individuals who use those credentials to obtain employment, promotion, licensure, or admission to an institute of higher learning. The bill makes violation of the new measure a Class 1 misdemeanor and provides for civil penalties to be imposed.

By the end of the month, I will have added to my website, <http://DelegateBobTata.com> additional up-to-date information on various issues pertaining to this year's legislative session. It also has a link "Virginia State Legislature" through which you may access all bills and budget amendments as well as a great deal of other data pertaining to the General Assembly.

It is always appreciated when constituents write, call, email or visit my office in Richmond to express interest and/or concerns with matters under consideration by the legislature. Be assured that I always take each one into consideration before acting on any proposal.

Thank you again for allowing me the privilege of serving the citizens of the Kempsville area both at the General Assembly and at home during the remainder of the year.

Yours truly,

Robert Tata