Dear Friends,

The overriding issue of the 2010 Session of the Virginia General Assembly was the state budget. The worst economic downturn since the Great Depression has hit Virginia hard: lost jobs have cut into state income tax and sales tax receipts, at the same time that safety net services such as health care and food assistance are in ever greater demand.

In order to deal with the impact of the “Great Recession” on Virginia’s economy and meet the state Constitution’s mandate that we balance the budget, the General Assembly this year had to close a $4 billion budget gap. Meeting this responsibility meant making tough choices: We were forced to make deep cuts in state funding for local elementary and secondary schools, Medicaid health care funding for vulnerable Virginians, and other core services.

The “Great Recession” will continue to weigh on issues before the General Assembly for years to come. Ongoing shortfalls in revenue will force us to make very hard choices with long term impacts. Virginians will see changes in state government, and the services it provides, that they may not like. These decisions must be made with as much information as we can gather, and alternatives must be discussed and debated by the people whose lives will be affected by them: citizens across the 48th District, Arlington, and Virginia.

Supporting a business environment with tax incentives and other assistance is a growing government practice. How aggressive should this support be when its immediate effect is to reduce funding available for core services such as higher education?

Many look to government efficiency as the answer to any government budget shortfall. But just about all the efficiencies that will return substantial money have been taken over the last ten years – that’s why we’re called the “best managed state in the nation.” And, while money can be saved by shifting emphasis from treating the results of our collective bad behavior (environment, illness) to prevention, preventative measures have an upfront cost. Are the long term savings worth the investment?

Virginia’s transportation system has been neglected for years, and Metro, the backbone of the local public transportation network, definitely shows its age. Commitment of state dollars is critical, but the importance of urban transportation is not understood throughout the state. How can we assure the necessary funding is available and at what cost to other programs? Are there alternatives to state funding?

Your input on questions such as these is important as I work in the General Assembly to craft a budget and initiatives that are responsive to the needs of the 48th District and the Commonwealth. Please let me know what you think on critical issues: Take the State Government Priorities Survey on my website: www.bobbrink.org under ISSUES.


You can contact my office by phone at (703) 531-1048 or by email at: delbrink@comcast.net. I look forward to hearing from you on this and other matters.

Bob Brink
Delegate
Report to the 48th District

Take my
State Government Priorities Survey

Go to: www.bobbrink.org

Dear Friends,

The overriding issue of the 2010 Session of the Virginia General Assembly was the state budget. The worst economic downturn since

The Democratic Party of Virginia
1710 E. Franklin St.
Richmond, VA 23223

The Democratic Party of Virginia
2010 Legislative Highlights

Ethics Reform. After ethical problems with a senior lawmaker and Vice Chair of the Appropriations Committee were revealed last year, several reform measures were enacted. The new laws require that an investigation of a member of the General Assembly take place even if that member resigns during the investigation and requires that the investigation process be open to the public. Additionally, members of the General Assembly will now be required to disclose all income, including from public sources. Previously, legislators only had to report income from private employers.

These measures were introduced and passed at the initiative of Democratic lawmakers.

Car Title Loan Reform. Continuing the progress on consumer protection issues made in the past several years, a new law limits interest rates, restricts the number of loans per customer, and places new restrictions on car title lenders. The law formerly allowed interest rates in excess of 36% secured by motor vehicles and were virtually unregulated. While the new measure is not an ultimate solution, it is an important step towards protecting Virginians.

Job-Enabling Legislation. In the worst economic times in recent history, a priority for the 2010 legislative session was putting Virginians back to work. Several new laws give tax credits to businesses for creating certain kinds of jobs and a new fund was created to give grants to localities for site planning, allowing them to create ready-made sites for businesses looking to locate in Virginia. Additionally, a new law requires a plan be developed to create more employment opportunities for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Promoting Renewable Energy Resources. Action was taken to better enable the development and use of renewable energy sources in Virginia. New measures include creation of the Virginia Offshore Wind Project Development Authority and a new tax credit for “green” job creation.

Flexibility for School Divisions. Recognizing the budget constraints facing Virginia’s school systems, a new law delays the implementation of certain new requirements that will be placed on schools. This means schools will not have to implement new state mandates while managing an incredibly difficult budget.

Health Insurance. New laws will ease the transition from private health care insurance to Medicaid and back resulting from job losses and rehires, improve Virginia’s COBRA provisions for small businesses, and implement certain provisions of the federal Children’s Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act of 2009.

Voting Rights. The General Assembly rejected measures to limit individuals’ right to register to vote and to vote at a polling place, based upon arbitrary decisions by election officials. These bills would have placed strict limitations on the types of information needed in order to register and vote. Thanks to convincing arguments about how these measures would inhibit the right of Virginia citizens to vote—sending us back to a time where certain Virginians were deprived of this constitutional right simply because of their race or sex—the bills were defeated.

Revenue Stabilization Fund. An amendment to Virginia’s Constitution will appear on the ballot for voters in November relating to the Revenue Stabilization Fund, or “Rainy Day Fund.” This fund is a reserve account that is only allowed to be used in certain difficult economic times in order to limit the impact of revenue shortfalls on the state budget and programs. If the amendment passes, the size of the fund will be increased by 50%.

Other items of note:
- A new law expands “Gang-Free Zones” to include not only schools but also publicly owned or operated community or recreational centers.
- A new measure makes “sexting” illegal by placing the same restrictions on profane or threatening language in text messaging as on phone calls or citizens band radio.
- The speed limit on some interstate highways will be increased to 70 miles per hour.
- A new fee paid by convicted criminal offenders that funds programs to fight sexual predators was added.
- Virginians will now be notified if their medical information is subject to a state database breach.
The biennial budget for fiscal years 2010-2012 was the biggest point of contention in the 2010 legislative session. The budget had already been significantly cut (over $6 billion since 2008) over the past several years as revenues slowed due to the recession and Virginia faced an additional shortfall of $4 billion. As a result, the “low-hanging fruit” had already been trimmed and deep cuts to core government services were unavoidable.

The final budget avoided tax increases, made greater economic development investments, and cut less from education, health care, and safety net services than originally proposed.

Highlights of the final version of the budget include:

- Makes significant changes to Virginia’s retirement system, to include greater contributions from new state employees and reducing payments into the Virginia Retirement System, which must be repaid in future years. These changes save well over $1 billion.
- Reduces public education spending by about $763 million, mitigated by the temporary lifting of state mandates (for example, authorizing localities to increase class sizes). Fortunately, we were able to avoid an additional $400 million in reductions.
- Reduces Higher Education spending by about $382.8 million, primarily through small reductions to Tuition Assistance Grants, cooperative extension programs at Virginia Tech, and the Eminent Scholars program. Because Higher Education has taken the brunt of reductions in years past, we were able to avoid additional significant across the board cuts.
- Unfreezes the formula by which the state distributes aid to local schools, but holds harmless those localities that would otherwise experience a drastic cut in state funding (fully in the first year and by 50% in the second year).
- Adds about $103 million in new revenues from various sources including court fees, deed recordation fees, certain felony indictment and misdemeanor conviction fees, and fines for speeding.
- Provides $49.8 million investments in economic development initiatives like the Motion Picture Opportunity Fund and Virginia’s Wine Promotion Fund.
- Applies $370 million in anticipated federal funding to mitigate reductions in Medicaid funding.
- Maintains current eligibility levels for FAMIS, meaning children will not lose health insurance.
- Increases overall General Fund spending for Health Care by about $1.37 billion.
- Reduces Mental Health funding by about $56.7 million.
- Reduces Public Safety funding by about $495 million.

Virginia Sales Tax Holidays

**August 6–8, 2010**

**Back-to-School Clothing and Supplies**

During this three-day period, purchases of certain school supplies, clothing and footwear will be exempt from the Virginia sales tax. Each eligible school supply item must be priced at $20 or less, and each eligible article of clothing and footwear must be priced at $100 or less.

**October 8–11, 2010**

**Energy and Water Conservation Products**

During this four-day holiday, purchases of energy-efficient appliances meeting the Energy Star and WaterSense qualifications will be exempt from the Virginia sales tax. Eligible products must be priced at $2,500 or less for each item, and be purchased for home or personal use.

For more information go to:  [www.tax.virginia.gov](http://www.tax.virginia.gov)
9/11 Heroes Memorial Highway

On the morning of September 11, 2001, as part of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States, American Airlines Flight 77 came in low over Route 27 in Arlington and smashed into the west front of the Pentagon, killing 184 innocent men, women and children. Over the next days, weeks, and months, thousands of first responders—from Arlington, surrounding jurisdictions, and across the nation—worked to restore order, rescue the injured and retrieve the bodies of the victims, and contain a fire that threatened to consume the entire building.

Under legislation that I introduced during the 2010 General Assembly session, Route 27 in front of the Pentagon will be designated as the “9/11 Heroes Memorial Highway.” Renaming the road will pay tribute to the innocent victims as well as the firefighters, police, and other emergency workers whose selfless professionalism helped the Pentagon and the nation rise from the ashes of tragedy.

TOWN MEETING

Please join Senator Mary Margaret Whipple, Delegate Patrick Hope and me to discuss the 2010 General Assembly Session, the state budget and any other issues you want to talk about!

Saturday, June 19th
10:30 AM to 11:30 AM

Westover Branch Library
1644 N McKinley Rd
Arlington VA 22205

On April 28, Virginia’s First Lady, Maureen McDonnell, joined Arlingtonians at the ribbon cutting ceremony for Glebe Elementary School’s Reading Garden. The outdoor learning space will encourage awareness of our connection to nature and protection of the ecosystem and watershed.