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JOHN WATKINS TALKS ABOUT THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The General Assembly has reconvened in Richmond for this year's legislative session and, as always, I will be sending updates of what is happening at the Capitol and what I am working on as your voice in the Virginia Senate.

This year is what is known as the "short session" because the Assembly will meet for 46 days, 14 days fewer than we do in even numbered years. This is primarily because the Assembly adopts the Commonwealth's two-year budget in even numbered years while in odd numbered years we tweak the budget as needed.

While the Assembly will not be passing a full budget this year, that does not mean there is not a lot of legislation to consider and work to be done. The 140 members of the General Assembly have proposed a combined 2,480 bills this session. And in this short period of time, they will all be considered.

In addition to that mountain of bills, the Governor and members of the Assembly are proposing amendments to the budget that was passed last year—those tweaks I mentioned earlier. As a member of the Senate Finance Committee, I will be part of the group that considers the amendments proposed by my fellow Senators for inclusion in the final package of budget changes.

Of course, while all this is going on, I am working on passing the bills I have submitted, meeting with constituents, attending committee meetings and sessions of the Senate. The pace is hectic due to limited time to plow through all of the legislation and budget amendments, but it is important that we continue to keep our sessions brief so that Virginians can continue to have a true citizen legislature—that ensures that your elected leaders remain in close contact with the people we serve.

This year, the biggest issue to face the Assembly is transportation. There is a real eagerness on the part of Delegates and Senators to reach an agreement and resolve this issue once and for all. In fact, I am hopeful that by the time you read this column, a transportation solution will be announced that has the support of both the House and the Senate.

When it comes to transportation, I am committed to finding a solution that does not increase your taxes. Most of the transportation problems in Virginia exist in other

regions of the Commonwealth, and I firmly believe that the people who live in those regions should bear the primary financial burden of resolving their local road and transit snarls. However, I will also fight to make sure that no money is diverted from our area as metro-Richmond still has important road maintenance and construction needs too.

Next week, I will write about some of the legislation I have proposed. It is truly an honor to represent you in the Senate of Virginia. Please contact me or my staff if you have questions or suggestions about any of the issues that come before the General Assembly.

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