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10th District
Senate of Virginia

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John Watkins Talks About His Education Bills

This week I would like to tell you about two bills I introduced concerning education. The first will designate Virginia Commonwealth University status consistent with the authority granted two years ago to Virginia Tech, University of Virginia and The College of William and Mary. It consists of a management agreement with the University that authorizes greater autonomy over capital outlay projects and the ability to enact and approve leases. VCU would also manage its own information technology and procurement procedures. All of this would allow for more efficiency in how the University is operated. It would also provide mechanisms for more research and development at the University. VCU Medical Center was originally granted this status 12 years ago and successfully implemented a management structure that put in place cost controls and accountability.

VCU has absorbed approximately 32 percent of all of the enrollment growth in the state colleges and universities over the past 10 years. With an enrollment that now exceeds 30,000 students, it has become the Commonwealth's largest four-year university. Eighty-eight percent of the students who attend VCU are Virginia residents. It is a premiere university, and is fulfilling an important need in the access and affordability of four-year universities for Virginia students.

I have also introduced legislation which is the first major re-write of the statute spelling out requirements for textbook approval and purchasing for the state in conjunction with the Department of Education. For the first time it recognizes digital and electronic media as a textbook. It provides the requirement that any publisher offering textbooks for sale must also provide digital copies of the text, and it will enhance the ability to utilize other teaching systems to provide access to information to the students.

The re-write in the statute also provides that individual school systems will have more autonomy in the approval of textbooks and the ability to contract directly with the publishers to obtain the text. This includes a pricing structure that provides the best available pricing. These two components of the legislation will provide school systems with greater flexibility, efficiency in obtaining instructional material and better value for our ever-stretched educational dollars.

For those of you who have expressed interest in my impact fee bill, that bill passed out of the Local Government Committee with a substitute and was re-referred to the Finance Committee.

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Please check my web site at www.senatorjohnwatkins.com