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Challenging 2010 Session Begins

This is the first of several communications I will be sending to provide some background and perspective on the 2010 legislative session of the General Assembly. We have a new Governor, and we are beginning to sort through the volumes of legislation that have been or will be introduced. Needless to say, this is going to be one of the most challenging budget sessions we have ever faced. Certainly none of us in the legislature today has seen a recession like this or the effects it is having on business and government.

During the coming weeks I will probably dwell more on some of the parts of this budget as it gets played out in Senate Finance. I invite those of you who are interested to look at the General Assembly web page, specifically with Senate Finance concerning the staff summary at <http://sfc.state.va.us/index.shtml>.

Several pieces of legislation I have introduced deal with balancing the use of General Fund dollars against permit fees. These are some attempts on my part to retain the General Fund dollars for education, public safety and health and welfare.

Senate Bills 234 and 235 both raise per ton fees for permits for hazardous waste disposal and solid waste disposal. Over the years the costs of these permits have risen, and the General Fund is being called upon to subsidize these permits. I am also making an effort to ensure the use of these fee dollars is efficient and less time consuming.

Another piece of legislation deals with the Virginia Retirement System to conform retirement eligibility for individuals hired after July 1, 2010, with the age requirements of Social Security.

A couple of other pieces of legislation I have introduced have already made it to the floor of the Senate. One of these bills provides that an active duty member of the armed services, who is a Virginia resident home on leave, will not be required to obtain a temporary fishing license if he or she can present orders authorizing the leave.

I introduced this bill because a father in Powhatan wanted to take his son, on leave from the Army, fishing in a state park. The law now requires that, in order to fish, military persons must buy at least a five-day license for \$11. I feel that this bill is a little something we can do for our military people serving our United States.

Another bill already on the Senate floor deals with some technical amendments to the group health insurance for small employers. It makes sure that certain cancer screenings remain a part of any offered group insurance policy.

There has been much interest created by House Bill 10, which is the Health Care Freedom Act, sponsored by Delegate Robert Marshall. This legislation, as introduced, would prohibit any plan from

interfering with the right of a person or entity to pay for lawful medical services to preserve life or health. It also stipulates that no law shall impose a penalty or fine on anyone who declines or does not want to purchase a health insurance plan, with the exception of one required by court where an individual or entity is a named party in a judicial dispute.

I generally support this legislation as it is currently written and interpreted. I do reserve some judgment with the potential for changes that may be made as it moves through the House of Delegates and later as it is before the Senate. This legislation is an attempt to ensure some degree of sovereignty with regard to individual rights and the ability of states to appropriately govern without federal intervention.

This is the beginning of a two-month session that will see much activity. Thank you for the honor and privilege of representing this region of our state in the Senate of Virginia.

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