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**Spending and Cutting**

When we think about it, the snow storms that have buffeted our region in recent weeks can remind us of something or perhaps even teach us a lesson. Almost everything in our lives has a cost, Mother Nature included.

VDOT's snow removal budget for the year is spent. As they continue to do their best to keep our roadways safe this winter, the department will be forced to take money budgeted for other maintenance.

Here at the General Assembly we must remind ourselves that the vast majority of the bills we consider bear a financial cost. Sometimes that cost is born by the government, but often it is the private sector that pays for whatever policy we enact.

Of the [28 bills](#) introduced this year, a case can be made that virtually every one has some sort of financial impact. My primary guiding principal is that such legislation, in the end, must enhance our quality of life in the most cost efficient manner possible. I will highlight three to make my point.

[SB232](#) would align the retirement age for *future* state employees with that of Social Security recipients. Private sector and public sector workers would then be on an even footing when it comes to retirement. With increasing life expectancies we are working longer. Some of our most productive years are in the later part of our careers.

This bill would not affect current state workers, only those hired after July 1 of this year. The effect on the Virginia Retirement System would not be felt for many years. But in the long run, it will help keep the fund solvent. These changes will not affect early retirement criteria for our first responders (specifically, state and local police and fire and rescue.)

[SB245](#), which would delay the effective date of changes in our stormwater management regulations for one year, has been incorporated into another bill, [SB395](#). The regulations set to go into effect this summer are based on ten-year-old data that has recently been proven wrong.

As much as we all want to see the Chesapeake Bay restored to health, it makes no sense to put in place regulations based on false data. Furthermore, we would need to change them once EPA issues new guidelines based on the new, correct data. It is far better to do it right once, so that potential investors bringing new jobs to Virginia can be sure what their costs will be.

Finally [SB647](#) would have the State Corporation Commission or the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission review the effect on consumers and utilities of any law or mandate we place on utilities. The furious debate over Cap and Trade legislation on the national level underscores how we need real cost benefit analysis when we deal with energy policy.

Whenever legislation is introduced, someone in the executive branch analyzes its cost to state government. Its impact on the state budget is calculated, not the impact on family budgets or businesses' bottom lines. Further, changes in the tax code are done by static analysis. That is, it does not take into effect changes in taxpayer behavior. By their thinking, raising or cutting taxes does not promote more economic activity, and tax or fee increases do not dampen the economy. Clearly, that is not the case.

Whoever first coined the phrase "there's no such thing as a free lunch" got it right. As my fellow senators and I consider some 735 bills, we must be ever cognizant of how they will impact all Virginians, not just the state budget.

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