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February 11, 2009

### John Watkins Talks About Budget Concerns and Redistricting

The fifth week at the General Assembly finds us with the identical concerns that were expressed last year with the finalization of the Senate budget. The revenues are overstated and, unfortunately, the indications in the budget are, therefore, inaccurate, particularly for the year 2010. By finalizing the budget now, WE ARE MISLEADING SCHOOL SYSTEMS, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE PEOPLE. New revenue forecasts are due next week. My expectation is that there will be an additional \$500 million plus that will need to be removed from expected revenue. This will lead to a complete re-write of the budget now on the floor. This is not the way this budget should be handled. We should have waited for the adjusted revenue numbers.

Some still want to talk about the federal stimulus package, and all indications are that, if it gets passed, it will not be the panacea that many expect. I personally hope that it is primarily directed toward building infrastructure and jobs, "putting people to work."

I had success in the Senate with the passage of the Central Virginia Regional Transportation Authority. This is not to be confused with the RMA (Richmond Metropolitan Authority.) My legislation is permissive only, and it primarily focuses at this time on Chesterfield County and the City of Richmond. It provides an opportunity for these jurisdictions to work together to develop regional transportation plans. It also provides for other jurisdictions to join the authority when it is prudent for them individually and for the authority collectively. It includes the authorization of a regional congestion relief fee, which is, in essence, a grantor's tax that can be authorized by the respective Board of Supervisors or City Council. The primary reason for this is to give the authority, if formed, a mechanism to pay for its initial development and planning.

I previously mentioned my commending resolution to the crew of the John Adams HBO production. That resolution has now been agreed to by both the Senate and the House. Filming a movie in Virginia is good for Virginia. For example, the John Adams mini-series spent \$81,775,102 in Virginia. A few examples of how this money was spent:

Technicians, Production Assistants, Hired in Virginia	\$9,025,750
Equipment Rental	2,412,814
Wardrobe	1,903,678
Car and Truck Rental	1,141,053
Construction Supplies	3,634,900

Finally, a comment on bipartisan redistricting: I favor a system that is initiated and put together on behalf of the people and one that is not totally reliant on partisan line drawing to secure favorable voting districts. I feel that redistricting should represent communities of interest and should attempt to maintain the integrity of local governments and regions. There is much to be gained from the input of an unbiased third party recommendation. Even if successful, it would still require passage by the General Assembly and approval by the Governor. It is the right way to go. So far we have been unsuccessful in our attempt to get this approved.

Quite a few visitors stopped by my office this week. Among them were Joshua Dixon, a cadet from Virginia Military Institute; Holly Aldridge and others voicing their concerns about the needs of autistic children; Jeanne Gallup, one of almost 300 Methodists who came to the Capitol; Donna Sitnik, who came from Amelia to be here as part of Presbyterian Day; and another Presbyterian visitor was the Rev. James A. Payne. I welcome their comments, input and opinions, and I welcome yours.

To follow the progress of any bill, please visit the General Assembly's web site at: <http://legis.state.va.us>.

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