

## SENATOR WATKINS' MESSAGE FROM THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The 2009 Virginia General Assembly has gotten off to a fast but disconcerting start. The financial picture is looking less and less optimistic all the time. In my future emails, I will try to further analyze some of my concerns about the budget.

In the meantime I want to spend the next couple of weeks making you aware of legislation I have introduced in this year's session.

SB 938 deals with real estate settlement agent registration. This effectively moves registration from the Virginia State Bar to the State Corporation Commission. Clearly this provides a better mechanism to oversee these agents, and it centralizes their licensure and registration with the Commission, which oversees most other financial operations in the state.

SB 939 deals with the rights of indigent defendants. This bill says that an indigent defendant who has been charged with a capital offense may move in circuit court for the appointment of experts to assist in the preparation of his defense. The presiding judge shall designate another judge in the judicial circuit who would hold an ex parte hearing on such a motion and may order the appointment of an expert. The expert's work is protected by attorney-client privilege; however, the defendant shall comply with the discovery rules set forth in the Rules of the Supreme Court.

Providing for the licensure of landscape architects by the Board for Architects, Professional Engineers, Land Surveyors, Certified Interior Designers and Landscape Architects is the purpose of my bill SB940. Licensure, which would be effective July 1, 2010, is required so that work products of landscape architects – people who are appropriately trained to handle land planning and land use issues – can be appropriately recognized by developers and government entities that fund and implement development as licensed.

I am honored to sponsor legislation in memory of Staff Sergeant Jason R. Arnette, who lost his life while serving his third tour of duty with the U.S. Army's 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division in Iraq. SB 941 will name a bridge on Route 360 in Amelia County in his memory. It is truly a privilege to recognize the sacrifice made by this heroic soldier and Virginian. The Transportation Board will also consider this designation during its next meeting. If its resolution is passed, however, my legislation will not be necessary.

SB 942, which was requested by the Chesterfield County Board of Supervisors, will add provisions to the charter of Chesterfield County requiring the salary of the clerk of the circuit court to be paid out of the general fund of the county. Likewise, the expenses of the office of the clerk of the circuit court, including the compensation of the deputies and employees of the office, shall be paid out of the general fund of the county. All clerk's fees and commissions received by the clerk of the circuit court for the performance of the clerk's official duties pursuant to statute and local ordinance will be paid into the general fund of Chesterfield County.

Senate Joint Resolution 303 designates 2009 as the Year of Astronomy in Virginia in conjunction with the United Nations declaration of the year 2009 as the International Year of Astronomy.

These are just a few of the issues that will be addressed at the 2009 Session of the General Assembly. Please do not hesitate to contact my office on these and other issues of importance to you. I would also suggest that for those particularly desiring to follow action on the budget, the entire budget will be available at the state web site: <http://legis.state.va.us>.

You are welcome to visit my web site: [www.senatorjohnwatkins.com](http://www.senatorjohnwatkins.com). We will be updating the web site with information and photos as the session progresses.

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