

SENATOR RICHARD STUART



Dear Friend:

As we have completed the regular session of the General Assembly for this year, I wanted to take a moment to let you know what I was able to accomplish during my first session as your State Senator.

One of the most important issues facing the General Assembly was determining the state budget for the next two years – especially difficult during this time of slow economic growth. Just like families setting their budget, it is necessary to set the state budget with realistic goals and revenue that you can count on coming in. Unfortunately, the budget put forth was unacceptable and based on unrealistic numbers for growth of over 6 percent in 2010 when we are just over 2 percent growth for this year. The budget we voted on takes \$350 million out of the rainy day fund, makes substantial cuts in basic aid to localities, and, at the same time, it gives across the board raises to state employees and teachers. While I believe it is vital to compensate our state employees and teachers with raises, I am concerned that we have not seen the worst of this economic downturn, and that overly optimistic income projections for the next two years will fall short and we may find ourselves in desperate circumstances where we may need to use the Rainy Day Fund for its true intent. It is because of this that I voted against the budget. In setting the state budget, we should be more conservative in our projections and much more conservative in our spending going forward to be prepared for the economic downturn that we are in and is expected to continue.

In addition to the budget, the Senate considered thousands of pieces of legislation concerning issues of importance to our region and the Commonwealth. Below are the highlights of legislation I put forth and were approved by the General Assembly:

NATURAL RESOURCES AND CONSERVATION

[Senate Bill 135](#), commonly referred to as “the fertilizer bill,” was the most difficult piece of legislation I was able to get approved. This bill requires the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and the Department of Recreation and Conservation to develop and implement regulation that will require nutrient management, soil analysis, as well as rate and timing of applications of fertilizer on non-agricultural lands. As many of you know, the farmers are already regulated and follow a nutrient management plan. However, lawn care companies and others are not. The bulk of the fertilizer that runs into the Chesapeake Bay can directly be attributed to misapplications of fertilizer on many fronts. This legislation in no way attempts to stop companies from using fertilizer, but it requires them to use it

responsibly and only use what is needed on lawns. While this bill was met with great resistance – and at one point appeared to be doomed – we were able to get it passed. I believe that this legislation will do more for water quality than we have done in many years.

[Senate Bill 378](#) is a bill which authorizes and directs the Department of Conservation and Recreation to establish regulations for the reclaiming and reuse of storm water. This is designed to stop pollutants from going into the Chesapeake Bay through storm water run-off and help us recycle one of our most precious resources. This will also help us preserve water by recycling storm water and using it for things such as irrigation.

[Senate Bill 681](#) is a bill that carves out an exception to allow regular plumbers to work on surface wells or shallow wells if they are working for a 501(c) (3) not-for-profit corporation. This was specifically done for the Northern Neck to help the folks with SAIF water get people with shallow wells repaired as needed.

PUBLIC SAFETY

[Senate Bill 152](#) provides a presumption against bond for illegal aliens who are charged with a crime in Virginia. Illegal aliens are breaking the law, first of all, by virtue of being here. When they are charged with crimes and given bond to appear for trial, many of them do not. This does not mean that the judge cannot give them bond, but it means they must satisfy the court that they have significant enough ties to this area and that they will be of peace and good behavior to ensure their appearance for trial.

[Senate Bill 136](#) prohibits the use of cell phones by school bus drivers while they are driving a bus. This bill is a commonsense, public safety measure to protect school children by keeping the bus driver's eye on the road and in control of the bus.

[Senate Bill 153](#) is my V.D.O.T. community landscaping program. This legislation allows non-violent criminal offenders to do the maintenance work on the right-of-ways in the Virginia that are managed by V.D.O.T. We have thousands of miles of right-of-way and our maintenance budget takes up the majority of our transportation money. This bill allows us to use another labor pool to accomplish that work, will save the state money while at the same time teaching people that there are repercussions for their actions.

BROADBAND DEPLOYMENT

[Senate Bill 206](#) allows state-owned communication towers and, most importantly, state police communication towers to be used for the deployment of wireless broadband in unserved areas of our district and the Commonwealth. This change is vital because it allows us to get high speed internet to those areas of our district that otherwise could not get it by landline and will help economic development.

GOOD GOVERNMENT

[Senate Bill 376](#) is a transparency in government bill which requires local school systems to publish their budgets on line if they have a website. If not, they must have a hard copy on file for public inspection. This is just a good transparency in government bill so you can see how your tax dollars are being spent.

ACCESS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

I co-patroned [House Bill 214](#), with Delegate Mark Cole, that makes public schools a place of public accommodation under the American's With Disabilities Act. This legislation clarified some confusion as to whether or not public schools are covered by ADA and will allow service dogs to accompany children with severe physical disabilities to school.

COLONIAL BEACH

[Senate Bill 165](#) is an amendment to the Town of Colonial Beach charter to allow individuals driving golf carts to cross at marked intersections in 35 M.P.H. zones.

[Senate Bill 375](#) is also amendment to the charter of the Town of Colonial Beach that makes the chief of police an employee at will.

All-in-all, I believe we had a successful session for the people of our district. We will be reconvening on April 23, 2008, for a veto session, a transportation session and some other limited matters. I appreciate the opportunity you have given me to serve you and hope that you know that my office is always opened to you. If you have any questions, concerns, or ideas on how we can better improve our region, please feel free to contact me at richard@stuartforsenate.com or my district office number (804) 493-8892.

I look forward to keeping you up-to-date on the matters in the General Assembly.

Sincerely,

Richard Stuart

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