

Jennifer
McCLELLAN

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In This Issue

Budget Highlights
Two Special Sessions
To Complete
Unfinished Business

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Dear Chris,

On Thursday, March 13th, the General Assembly adjourned sine die after adopting the "Caboose" budget and 2008-2010 Biennial Budget. Below are the highlights.

Budget Highlights



Public Education: The Budget provides \$14.5 billion for direct aid to public education over the 2008-2010 biennium, including an increase of approximately \$1 billion in current funding to fully fund the Standards of Quality. It includes a 2.0% pay raise for all SOQ funded instructional and support positions. It also provides about \$64 million each year to maintain the Virginia Preschool Initiative program for free lunch "at-risk" four year old students. The Budget adds \$1.2 million for a variety of supplemental education program initiatives, such as National Board Certification bonuses, Virginia Teaching Scholarships, Jobs for Virginia Graduates, planning for a new Governor's School, increasing the student cap at Governor's Schools, and funding the Commission on Civics Education.

Higher Education: The Budget provides a \$168.9 million General Fund increase for colleges and universities and

affiliated institutions. These increases are focused on moderating tuition increases over the biennium, base operating needs, financial aid, and research. The Budget includes \$35 million to continue a tuition moderation incentive fund to keep tuition and fee increases for in-state undergraduate students to no more than 3 percent. Institutions can increase tuition an additional 1 percent if the additional revenue is used for financial aid for in-state undergraduate students. The Budget also includes \$19.4 million for undergraduate student financial aid (\$18.2 million for students at public institutions and \$1.2 million for Tuition Assistance Grants). The Budget provides \$32.9 million for research, primarily at Virginia's doctoral research institutions, including \$1 million for cancer research at VCU. The Budget also includes \$37 million to provide a 2 percent average faculty salary increase in each year and \$171.4 million for a 2.0 percent salary adjustment in the first year and an additional 2.0 percent in the second year for state employees, college faculty and state supported local employees.

Health and Human Services: The Budget provides an additional \$548.5 million over the biennium for mandatory programs such as Medicaid, children's health insurance programs (FAMIS and Medicaid SCHIP), the Comprehensive Services Act, foster care and adoption subsidies, and to offset the loss of federal funds from law and policy changes affecting social services and child support enforcement. The Budget also provides \$76 million in new investments in community mental retardation and mental health services. This includes \$34.4 million for mentally retarded individuals on the waiting list for services. This also includes \$34.3 million to address mental health treatment needs of individuals in crisis or who meet the criteria for mental health treatment set forth in new legislation related to civil commitments and mentally ill criminal defendants and jail inmates. The Budget adds \$5.8 million to add 40 children's mental health clinicians (one per CSB) and \$1.5 million to enhance mental health services oversight and training.

The Budget also provides \$13.4 million over the biennium, including \$10.6 million to increase payments for family foster care rates by 23 percent and \$1.7 million to increase foster and adoptive family recruitment, support, training, and retention.

Public Safety: The Budget provides \$1.5 million to fund "[Alicia's Law](#)" to help prevent Internet crimes against children. The Budget also includes \$150,000 to provide law enforcement officers with immigration law training and Spanish skills. The Budget also provides \$253,000 per year for the Commonwealth Challenge Program serving at-risk

youth.

Natural Resources: The budget makes several investments in preserving and protecting our environment. The budget includes funding to begin identifying and correcting non-point source pollution of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries, and it sets aside money to increase the amount of conserved open space for current and future Virginians. The Budget also includes \$3 million for combined sewer overflow projects in Richmond and Lynchburg.

Two Special Sessions To Complete Unfinished Business *Bond Package and Transportation Remain on the Agenda*

Immediately upon adjournment sine die of the 2008 Regular Session, the Special Session was convened to consider legislation relating to bonds and capital improvement. The Special Session is scheduled to meet after adjournment of the Reconvened Regular Session (i.e. "Veto Session"). At that time, we expected to resolve remaining differences over Governor Kaine's proposal to significantly advance capital construction on university and community college campuses around the state, so as to ensure that our schools have the capacity to educate more Virginians, train a 21st century workforce and conduct important research.

A second Special Session is expected to address transportation issues. Last year, the General Assembly passed House Bill 3202 to address Virginia's transportation funding needs. With the repeal of the abusive driver fees and the Supreme Court's ruling nullifying the regional plans that last year's compromise put in place, we are once again faced with the challenge of adequately funding transportation.

Governor Kaine has announced he will meet with legislators from both houses and both parties, local officials and other stakeholders to seek a funding solution for transportation.

If you would like to express your opinion on legislation before the General Assembly, please contact me at (804) 698-1171 or deljmcclellan@house.state.va.us.

Sincerely,



Jenn

Jennifer McClellan
House of Delegates

email: info@jennifermcClellan.com

phone: (804) 698-1171

fax: (804) 786-6310

web: <http://www.jennifermcClellan.com>