

Delegate Donald Merricks

2012 General Assembly Weekly Column #3

We are in full swing here in Richmond as we are finishing up our third week of session. Committees are in high gear hearing bills and I am busy attending the meetings of the four committees and five sub-committees I serve on. There is never a spare minute, and, for those who have stopped by to see me, I apologize if I wasn't available to see you or missed your name on the list of visitors below. As we move toward crossover, schedules will become more hectic.

As far as my bills are concerned, some have made it and some have not. I introduced HB590 which would have only allowed utility companies to receive reimbursement for expenses for renewable energy initiatives if the money was spent in Virginia. I personally feel this was the intent of the legislation that passed in 2007, however, my bill was tabled in sub-committee. Another bill, HJ97, would direct the State Council of Higher Education (SHEV) to study uniform funding for the four higher centers in Virginia. The study will review best practices in the administration of higher education centers; opportunities for efficiency in the operation of higher education centers; and strategies that would ensure higher education centers meet statewide and regional goals. This bill passed the sub-committee and will be heard in full committee.

The Governor's K-12 policy initiatives were introduced last week. While I am in agreement with some, I have reservations with others. Doing away with teacher continuing contracts sounds good on the surface, but the way our schools currently perform teacher evaluations seems sufficient. We should be about improving the performance of all teachers and those who do not meet the standard should be given opportunities to improve or move on. Another issue is the Virginia Retirement System (VRS). I agree with the Governor that the system that now exists is not sustainable and substantive changes must be made in order for all employees to be able to receive retirement pay in the future. We will be discussing these and other issues over the next couple of weeks.

This past weekend Patti and I were honored to attend the Commemorative Session of the General Assembly held at the original House of Burgesses in Williamsburg. This is done every four years and it's always a wonderful time. This year's keynote speaker was Dr. James I. "Bud" Robertson, Jr., a Danville native, who is world renown for his writings and knowledge of the Civil War. He gave an excellent speech and inspired all in attendance. We are so fortunate in Virginia to have had the minds that framed our government in its infancy. The Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights all played an important part in bringing our country back together after

the Civil War. There were more lives lost in the Civil War than in all other wars combined. A point Dr. Robertson made that I had never given much thought to was the loss of what could have been. With so many lives lost and so many disabled, the children that would never be born--what a loss and what a tragedy.

We attended church Sunday morning at the Bruton Parrish Church in Williamsburg. This was a special treat and it was interesting to see the names on the plaques at the end of the pews, names like George Washington, John Tyler, James Madison, Patrick Henry and many more.

As always, it was good to see people from home. Visiting this week were Joshua Boccock, Dorothy Carter, Darryl Holland, Kenneth Peal, Chuck Jennings, Naomi Hodge-Muse, Doris Gravely, Larneal Reynolds, Cecil Dallas, James Sharazz, Greg Hill, Ruth Easley, and Bill and Barbara Winn. Fletcher White, Dr. Thelma White, Tommy Motley, Douglas Sharpe, Susan Mathena, Barbara and Andy Parker, Michael Duncan and John Morris, III also made the trip to Richmond to visit.