

## ***Make Your Views Known***

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The fall season is intensely busy for state legislators as we prepare for the General Assembly session that will convene on January 12, 2005. Every day is scheduled with a breakfast, lunch, dinner and/or reception as interest groups vie for our time to present a case on behalf of their legislative agenda. The intensity is added to this year by the availability of some unanticipated revenue, or "budget surplus" as some insist that it be called. A billion dollars is cited, but the actual dollars available beyond existing statutory obligations are much less. The 2005 session is a "short session," 45 rather than 60 days, because the biennial budget process does not require the passage of a full budget this year. But with the unmet needs that are being presented to us, it is hard to believe that we will not do a full-scale budget review.

The schedule for one day last week presented a classic conflict that is likely to be symbolic of the entire legislative session. During the middle of that day, the Governor held a meeting at Northern Virginia Community College with legislators and business and community leaders "to focus on the needs and goals for higher education in Virginia and to help develop a shared education agenda for the Commonwealth." At exactly the same time at George Mason University, the Northern Virginia Transportation Alliance was hosting a luncheon with Virginia Department of Transportation Commissioner Philip Shucet and economist Stephen Fuller "to examine the Commonwealth's transportation funding crisis and potential impacts on our economy."

The bottom line for both meetings is that more funding is needed to meet future needs. Both groups of advocates base their arguments on the need for investments in our future for sustained economic growth. Just as it was not possible to attend both meetings, so it is not possible to support both requests under the present financial structure of the state. Some legislators are saying that general funds should be transferred to transportation. The money being talked about for transferring is the same money the colleges need to provide classes for the 50,000 additional students expected over the next decade. There will be some "smoke and mirrors" proposals, as the late Appropriations Committee Chairman Dorothy McDiarmid used to call them. With all delegates running for reelection next year, election-year politics will play a part in the legislative deliberations.

If you do not belong to a special interest group that will be lobbying me on your behalf, please know that your views are equally of interest to me. That is why I provide a voter survey on my website, [www.kenplum.com](http://www.kenplum.com). Please respond to it. If you would like a printed copy of the survey, call 703.758.9733 and leave your name and address for a copy to be sent to you. And I invite you to participate in the public hearing I will be having with Senator Janet Howell on Wednesday, January 5, 2005, 7:30 to 9:00 p.m. at the Reston Regional Library. You do not need to pre-register. Just show up and tell us what you think on the issues.

Lobbying is an important part of the legislative process. Make sure your voice is heard.