

A Roadmap for Virginia's Future

Kenneth R. "Ken" Plum

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One of the most hopeful pieces of legislation passed by the 2003 session of the General Assembly establishes a Council for Virginia's Future and a long-term, results based planning process termed a Roadmap for Virginia's Future. One area of agreement by those across the political spectrum is that Virginia has no long-range plan. Decisions to embark on additional spending and to cut taxes are made at the same time with little consideration of the impact of one on the other. Two decisions of great impact on state government, ending parole and eliminating the car tax, were made with scant attention to the way that the first would increase the cost of state government and the latter would reduce revenues for all programs.

The legislation on planning for the future was recommended by the Coalition for Virginia's Future. The need for long-term planning had been advocated by the Virginia Business Council for many years, and the Council was joined in this most recent pursuit by 15 other business organizations. The recognition that no business could survive the hand-to-mouth way that state government operates led to the proposal.

Under the legislation, the Council on Virginia's Future would be chaired by the Governor and composed of 18 members including two cabinet secretaries, legislative leaders, and seven citizens who are not members of state government. The Council would be responsible for making recommendations for long-term objectives to the Governor and General Assembly. Beginning next year the Council would be responsible for issuing a scorecard to the public assessing current service performance and progress toward meeting long-term objectives.

The Roadmap for Virginia's Future refers to the planning process to be undertaken by the agencies of state government. It includes the development of a vision for each agency, alignment of state services to meet long-term objectives, and the institution of a planning and performance management system. Anyone involved in a large corporate enterprise or a governmental agency at any level will recognize this system as being very much like the management by objectives (MBO) and systems by other names that have come and gone over the years. This one need not be treated as a fad, however, for the need for strategic planning has never been greater in state government.

The people of the Commonwealth and its elected leaders have a great deal of work to do in defining our state and what we want it to be for our children and grandchildren. From that vision, revenue measures can be reformed, budget priorities established, and appropriate legislation put into place. The Council on Virginia's Future and the Roadmap provide a vehicle for making this important work happen.

I think this legislation is so important that I have recommended to the Governor that he introduce an amendment to it at the reconvened session to make it go into effect immediately rather than wait for the usual July 1 effective date.