

A Lesson in Ground Hog Politics

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The fall season version of Ground Hog Day occurs during election campaigns when political candidates start jumping at every shadow. And this election season in Virginia is particularly filled with eerie shadows as Moody's Investors Service has put Virginia on a watch list for its hallowed triple-A bond rating. Not only do these ratings indicate the kind of job we are doing managing the state's finances, but they save us millions of dollars in bond interest rates. Seems that Moody's analysts are concerned that we have almost depleted our rainy day fund during the past two years of a monsoon of declining revenue, but they also think we cannot afford the billion-dollar car tax cut. The ultimate fix for this problem of restructuring taxes to be fairer and to raise adequate revenues casts such a dark shadow that it will keep most politicians hiding in their holes until after Election Day.

The most extreme example of ground hog politics occurred a couple of weeks ago when the General Assembly's Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC), the state's version of the GAO, reported that computers and technology in the public schools are under-funded by \$28 to \$250 million. These findings were made by a nonpartisan staff of researchers whose job it is to gather and evaluate data.

So upset was the Republican majority on the legislative oversight board of JLARC that they refused to receive the report. Such a report's findings could be cited as further evidence that the General Assembly was not adequately funding public schools.

Go to JLARC's website, <http://jlarc.state.va.us>, click on their September 8 agenda and on the item "Funding Formula for Educational Technology." When you try to get the briefing papers or the report, you will get a blank screen. Poof! The evidence is gone. Politicians can go hide in their holes. Schools will not have enough computers, but we will simply pretend it is not true. The delegate who led the effort to suppress the report is Chairman of the House Republican Caucus and likely the next chairman of the House Transportation Committee.

Several years ago JLARC conducted a study on the state's funding of public schools and found that the state under-funds public schools by a billion dollars a year. Fortunately, no one on the legislative panel for JLARC moved to suppress the report. It continues to be the most often quoted document about the inadequacy of state funding based on financial analysis and hard evidence.

Ironically, the suppression of the JLARC report on funding technology in the schools may actually give the report greater public attention. Most of these reports can be pretty dry reading filled with tables and charts. Many of the reports may not be too closely read. But this report by not even being printed will be referenced many times as an example of politicians hiding from their responsibilities.

There is no hiding on November 4. It is time for their constituents to hold those elected officials accountable.