



## Senator Houck Reports From Richmond

*February 26, 2007*

As I write, we are in the final hours of the 2007 General Assembly Session. During our 46 days in Richmond, legislators were faced with decisions significantly impacting our citizens. Overall, this session was productive for the 17<sup>th</sup> District in terms of successful legislation and budget amendments. In addition to numerous approved amendments, thirteen of my 16 introduced bills have passed both houses and await the Governor's signature.

Some, but not all, of my successful legislative initiatives include:

- Increasing the state income tax filing thresholds. Individuals may amass a greater income before having to file taxes with the state, beginning in 2008.
- Providing a three percent salary increase for teachers.
- Increasing funds to assist those suffering with sickle cell anemia by expanding clinical services and supporting community based programs for individuals, families and support groups. Funding for these services has not increased since 1994 while the caseload has grown by 186 percent.
- Making several changes to the benefits of state and local public safety officers and the funding of such benefits.
- Requiring the reporting of health care data to Virginia Health Information (VHI) permanent. VHI collects this information for analysis while working with the Virginia Department of Health to provide more cost-effective and higher quality healthcare.

- Extending the current sales and use tax exemption for textbooks and educational materials distributed by publishers to educators at no cost until 2012.
- Creating a clear oversight role for the existing Intermodal Office within the Office of the Secretary of Transportation in developing environmental reviews for major corridors and ensuring that major planning adequately consider all modes and potential solutions.

For the third consecutive session, I was humbled and proud to be selected by Republican Senator John Chichester, Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, as a member of the Budget Committee of Conference. By selecting me, Senator Chichester noted my experience as a public educator and a senior Senator. As a Budget Conferee, I play an integral role in drafting the final budget.

As of this writing, the Conference Committee is meeting to examine and reconcile the differences between the House of Delegates' budget and the Senate's budget. Once the differences are resolved, the Conference Committee Report is presented to both houses for consideration. If agreed to, the Budget Bill is sent to Governor Kaine for his signature.

It has been an honor to serve the 17<sup>th</sup> District for a 24<sup>th</sup> session in Richmond. While I am proud of my work accomplished at the General Assembly, I am eager to return home. Through the year if you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact me. My Spotsylvania office can be reached via telephone at (540) 786-2782, via fax at (540) 891-8805 and via e-mail at [senatorhouck@comcast.net](mailto:senatorhouck@comcast.net).