

The Senate Sentinel

A newsletter from State Senator Chap Petersen
Representing Central Fairfax County and Fairfax City

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 1

FALL 2008



YOUR VOICE IN RICHMOND

It's an honor to represent you in the Virginia State Senate. Please use this newsletter and my website, www.fairfaxsenator.com as a resource in allowing me to represent you.

The State Senate will be back in session full-time in January 2009. Until then, I will be knocking on doors, attending events or visiting with community groups in Fairfax, Vienna, Oakton, Annandale and Burke. If you see me walking through your neighborhood, please don't be alarmed. My only purpose is to meet you and learn how I can represent you better! I am also pleased to be



Meet the Petersens:
(From l to r:) Chap, wife Sharon, Eva, Tommy and Mary Walton

servicing with my colleagues this summer on several legislative commissions, including Virginia's Commission on Energy and the Environment, a key state group seeking Virginia-based solutions in the global marketplace. I expect that

our study will form the basis for several pieces of legislation in 2009 and beyond over the next few years.

Virginia is a great state and we have a great community here in Fairfax. I learn from my constituents, whether by knocking on their doors or answering their letters. Let me know how we can make this Commonwealth better.

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VIRGINIANS FIGHT ECONOMIC DOWNTURN

The weak real estate market and slow economy will cause a major reduction in state spending in 2009. In expectation of declining revenues, the Governor has told every state agency to cut costs from 5-15% until we are able to survive the downturn.

In 2009, my focus will be on finding cost savings and preserving core priorities in Richmond. There are ways the state can significantly

save money. For example, we are spending \$50 million a year on building new penitentiaries in Virginia for a spiraling prison population. On many levels, we cannot afford that. It is time for sentencing reform on nonviolent felonies.

We also need comprehensive energy and efficiency audits to save money on the construction and operation of our state

buildings.

I believe in this state and its entrepreneurs. We will survive this economic downturn and emerge stronger in the next few years. However, it is unavoidable that the next few months will see some painful cuts in the state budget. These cuts will have an impact on local services around the state.

ENERGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

My focus as a State Senator is simple: promote clean energy, open spaces and environmental preservation in Virginia, so that our children and grandchildren can enjoy the natural resources that we have been given.



Daughter Eva enjoying the view at Hungry Mother State Park

In 2008, I authored and sponsored the Clean Energy Future Act (SB 446) which required 20% of Virginia's energy to be from renewable sources by year 2020 and also set strict standards on

energy efficiency. The legislation created a market in "renewable energy credits" and an incentive fund for renewable energy producers in Virginia.

After several hearings and significant opposition from established interests, the bill was defeated in Committee. However, it received more support – both publicly and within the Assembly – of any alternative energy bill in my memory. I can't wait to raise this issue again in our next session.

The Clean Energy Future Act was my highest profile bill. However, I also sponsored SB 447, which requires LEED energy

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"I'd like to see us reach a balance in terms of our use of resources and ability to restore resources," Petersen said. "For example, as we're developing new housing, we're replanting the trees pulled up for the projects."

*-Fairfax County Times
April 26, 2008*

PROTECTING OUR STUDENTS

Access to higher education is a critical issue in the 34th State Senate District.

This year, I was proud to be the chief sponsor of SB 510, the "Student Bill of Rights." This bill reformed the student loan industry by prohibiting student loan vendors from entering exclusive access deals with college financial aid offices.

This nefarious practice, documented on "Sixty Minutes," was previously legal in Virginia and many other states. As a result, college students seeking financial aid were forced to pay above-market interest rates, while administrators often received lucrative gifts from companies that benefitted from the exclusive arrangement.

My bill, also patroned by Donald McEachin (D-Henrico), passed the Assembly and was signed into law by Governor Kaine on March 12, 2008. It outlawed these exclusive deals and required state schools to inform students of their various credit options when seeking financial aid. As a result of our bill, each student entering a

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MOVING BEYOND GRIDLOCK

The issue of transportation continues to baffle the Assembly. On February 28, 2008, the Virginia Supreme Court found that the 2007 Transportation Act, passed by last year's Assembly, was unconstitutional because it delegated taxing power to an unelected body, the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority. This summer, Governor Kaine called us into special session to find a solution. In the Senate, I sponsored SB

5018 with John Edwards (D-Roanoke) to create a \$1 billion annual fund with a focus on mass transit. That bill, which directed 35% of new funds to northern Virginia, was adopted into the omnibus Senate bill SB 5018. SB 5018 passed on a party-line vote in the Senate. It was killed by the House, due to the fact that it had a "penny/gallon" increase in the gas tax.

We need a bipartisan

solution, and I'm working on that right now. I believe we must attack our transportation challenges with a statewide solution that uses broad-based and uniform taxes, not the patchwork of "regional fees" constructed from last year's Transportation Act. Those taxes should encourage energy conservation. In urban corridors like Fairfax, the result should create an integrated system combining highway, bus and rail.



OTHER BILLS OF INTEREST

In addition to our transportation bill, the State Senate passed several other bills this year which were defeated in the House of Delegates. These bills include a statewide ban on smoking in public restaurants, the legalization of “no excuse” absentee voting, and bipartisan redistricting reform. I expect all these ideas to be proposed again in 2009. With a new majority in the House, we can make them law.

The House and Senate agreed to repeal the notorious “abuser fees” from 2007.” I sponsored one of the “repeal” bills and served on the conference committee which reached the final compromise between the House and Senate.

Are you interested in how I voted on those bills or any others? Feel free to review my voting record at the Assembly website: www.leg1.state.va.us.

ENERGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT-continued

efficiency standards for all new state buildings. That bill is still pending. Finally, I filed SB 448 which allows localities to enact “tree save” ordinances to preserve mature trees from development. That bill is now law.

After the 2008 session, the Senate leadership appointed me to the “Energy and Environment” Commission, which is charged with implementing a long-term vision for the Commonwealth on energy policy and climate change. Over the past few months, our Commission has studied potential new energy sources such as coastal wind, carbon-sequestered coal, and biofuels from natural waste products like algae. Our goal is to see Virginia become a leader in developing and marketing these “clean fuels.” If we succeed, it will be the greatest economic success for this state since the invention of the Internet.

PROTECTING OUR STUDENTS-continued

Virginia university and receiving student loans will now have the right to know that they are receiving a private loan offered at competitive interest rates.

In recognition of our growing student population, the Assembly also passed legislation in 2008 authorizing \$1.5 billion in bonds for the construction of new academic buildings on our state campuses over the next six years. The bond is subject to voter approval in the November 4th election. It may seem odd to authorize large capital expenditures during an economic slowdown; however, current interest rates for bonds are very low due to Virginia’s



Chap, Donald McEachin (D-Henrico) and Governor Tim Kaine at the bill signing for SB 510, “The Student Bill of Rights”

strong credit rating, and the need for more classrooms over the next six years is great. Therefore, I am endorsing the bond and humbly request your vote for it.

At the other end of the spectrum, the Assembly in 2008 also approved \$22 million in new funding for early childhood education programs in Virginia. With the anticipated freeze in state spending, this is one of the few programs to have additional funds allocated. I was pleased to support the measure after the Governor amended the original proposal to send more money to our local schools.

VOTE TUESDAY NOVEMBER 4, 2008!

If you don't know where your polling place is, please call your local registrar or contact my office at:

703.349.3361!



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The People's Senator!

Want to Be Involved?

Are you interested in Virginia history or politics? Do you want to be involved in our community? Do two things:

1. Sign up for our constituent newsletter at my website www.fairfaxsenator.com. Find out what's going on in the community and across this great state. Or let me know your opinion on a State Issue at my Assembly blog: www.oxroadsouth.com.
2. Contact Kathy Neilson at (703) 349-3361 or info@fairfaxsenator.com. You can also visit our district office at 4010 University Drive in downtown Fairfax. Let us know how we can represent you better.

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