

Despite these very difficult economic times, I hope that you find a moment to give thanks for living in the time and place we do. My father lost his favorite sister to scarlet fever, but when I got scarlet fever, penicillin just meant Mom had to burn the pictures I drew while isolated in bed. As my kids were growing up, I don't remember ever hearing about scarlet fever or most other childhood diseases. In so many aspects of our lives, we are the most uniquely fortunate in all of human history.

But, the challenges we face are very real. On the state level, we begin our annual legislative session January 12<sup>th</sup>. Even more importantly, by December 6<sup>th</sup>, I must request all but 5 of the bills I'll be allowed to introduce. Please, if you have any concerns that might be addressed through changing state law, contact me right away. It's best to email me at [vwatts@erols.com](mailto:vwatts@erols.com) so I can most accurately get a picture of the problem and/or your thoughts before we talk.

Major issues I hope we'll be wrestling with include critical Northern Virginia transportation needs (congestion, our aging transit system and inadequate road maintenance.) I have been working across the aisle with Joe May (Chair of the House Transportation Committee) and Tom Rust on a serious, comprehensive transportation package. It's finally obvious that selling the ABC stores for a quick dollar is no transportation fix.

Indeed, I appreciated all of you who shared your concerns with me about greatly increasing liquor sales, losing money that currently goes to education, loose enforcement, and questioning the financing that depended on Virginia having the highest liquor tax in the nation.

I do expect significant focus on cleaning up the Chesapeake Bay, as the long-standing deadlines under federal law are upon us. I also am working with those concerned about human trafficking and minors forced into prostitution. And, of course, I will continue to focus on mental health and fight for improved nursing home staffing and accessible veteran services.

However, the over-riding issue will be making sure the budget stays in balance. As I'm writing this, the latest data available is for just the first 3 months of the budget year through September. The good news is that Virginia's unemployment is down to 7% from the peak of 7.8% we reached in February. Although state government revenues grew 3.6%, the challenge is that the budget is based on a forecast of 4.2% growth. (See more at [www.finance.virginia.gov](http://www.finance.virginia.gov))

I'll be watching the full range of Virginia's economic indicators very closely. A great deal is at stake, especially funding public education and restoring payments to Virginia's retirement fund. As tough as these times are, however, I'm more grateful than ever for having the opportunity to help find the best path forward.

...Now, if my Thanksgiving rolls will just rise light and fluffy so I stay "awesome" in my grandsons' eyes, I can't ask for more!