

April 1, 2020

Constituents of the 55th District:

The 2020 Session of the General Assembly adjourned on Thursday, March 12th, exceeding 60-day limit by 5 days. We considered more than 3,600 pieces of legislation this year as Democrats took control of the legislature for the first time in over two decades. While not all of these bills ultimately became law, the new Democratic majority has attempted to make significant changes in Virginia.

Despite our smaller numbers, Republicans stood firm in our commitment to administer the Commonwealth using practical and conservative principles. When we held the majority, one of our top priorities was the need to protect Virginia's robust economy by encouraging businesses to settle and flourish across the state. We fought to protect the rights of citizens promised in our constitution and the Constitution of the United States. And most importantly, during the 2020 General Assembly, we have called upon the Democratic leadership to act in consideration of our entire Commonwealth, and not just a few regions, for example northern Virginia. Unfortunately, Democrats came to Richmond with a different agenda and set about passing several laws that drastically increase taxes, jeopardize Virginia jobs, infringe on your constitutionally protected rights, and place the security of our elections in doubt.

The new majority has enacted new taxes on gas and cigarettes. **HB1414** would bring in more than \$600 million over the biennium at a time when tax revenues are growing at near record rates. Democrats also voted to give counties the same taxing authority as cities. **HB 785** could cost hard working families another half billion in taxes at the local level over the next two years.

Virginia is the birthplace of representative Democracy, and there's nothing more paramount than ensuring our elections remain fair and secure. The House of Delegates has taken common sense steps to protect the integrity of our elections and secure the fundamental right to vote for every Virginian. Under Republican control and with our policies in place, Virginia saw multiple elections with record turnout. Unfortunately, multiple bills have passed that will lessen the integrity of the ballot box. **HB19** repeals Virginia's common sense "photo-ID" law and **HB201**

provides for citizens to register to vote on Election Day! The question I have is “what problem are they trying to fix?”

The passage of **HB980** which guts Virginia’s current abortion law allows Democrats to move forward in their quest to abandon “safe, legal, and rare” in favor of anywhere, at any time by anybody at taxpayer expense. **HB980** will roll back longstanding law designed to protect women and ensure an informed decision is being made about an abortion. Additionally, under these new policies, those who may perform an abortion has been drastically expanded, including up to the moment of birth.

One issue that generated significant interest was firearms and the Second Amendment. Democrats had signaled their intention to introduce a series of sweeping gun control measures as early as last summer. Fortunately, the worst of these measures failed, thanks to the voices of tens of thousands of Virginians who let the Democrats know that these bills went too far. **Bans on common sporting rifles, standard capacity magazines, and other accessories will not become law this year, however the Democrats have said they will revisit this issue in the 2021 General Assembly session.**

Legislation that passed includes **HB2** which will require background checks for any firearms sale, including private transactions and **HB674** which is a form of “red flag” law” that will allow police to seek a court order to seize firearms from those ruled to be a danger to themselves or others. **HB812** restores Virginia’s “one handgun a month” law, but with the same exemption for those with concealed carry permits. I believe that one of the most problematic is **HB421** which allows local governments to enact their own firearm ordinances. Virginia could potentially have a patch work system of firearm ordinances that will turn law abiding citizens into criminals.

Democrats also took steps to make life more difficult for local taxpayers, in the form of legislation that would for the first time permit collective bargaining for public employees. Under current law, local governments set budgets and come to agreements with employees on an individual basis. **HB582** will allow employees to form unions and negotiate as a group. Unlike the private sector -- where a bad deal with a union comes out of the company owner’s bottom line -- a bad deal with

public sector unions comes out of the pockets of taxpayers. While the impact won't be immediate, the long-term effect will be higher real estate taxes and bigger mortgage payments for homeowners around Virginia.

Democrats forced through a job-killing increase in the minimum wage. **HB395** will increase the Virginia's minimum wage to \$15 per hour by 2026. This will be a major expense for business and the taxpayer as the cost of government will also increase significantly. But just as important is the fact that this wrongheaded policy will be the cause of the loss of thousands of entry level jobs.

BUDGET – In short, while we funded some very important items, including public education, law enforcement, mental health, health care and transportation, the 2020 Virginia General Assembly will simply tax and spend too much. In fact, the budget that passed increases spending by 20%! For this reason, I am very concerned that these new financial obligations will make maintaining Virginia's fiscal integrity difficult at best. For these reasons, I voted against the budget. Now that the COVID19 pandemic has throttled Virginia's economy causing a significant drop in tax revenue, I am certain the Governor and the General Assembly will be revisiting our spending very soon. Keep in mind that after a bill is passed by the House and Senate, it must be signed by the Governor before becoming law.

Our Republican caucus stood united this session in defense of your rights, and I'm proud to say that while we couldn't prevail on every bill, we were successful in making terrible bills somewhat better. Thanks to the hard work and diligence of my colleagues, we were able to limit the damage to your rights to a significant degree.

As your delegate, I am always ready to serve you and your family. You can contact me through my district office email at Delbfowler@house.virginia.gov. For additional information, feel free to follow me or like my page on Facebook. You can also visit my website at <http://www.buddyfowler.com> to sign up for email updates. As always, if you have any questions or would like to share any thoughts, please do not hesitate to reach out.

Sincerely,

Delegate Buddy Fowler

