

Republican Perspective on Special Session II by Delegate Phil Hamilton and Senator Jill Vogel

RICHMOND, VA — This afternoon Delegate Phillip A. Hamilton (R-Newport News) and Senator Jill Holtzman Vogel (R-Fauquier) offered the Republican perspective on the Special Session II on transportation following Governor Kaine's address to a Joint Assembly of the Virginia House of Delegates and Senate of Virginia. The remarks are as follows:

Delegate Hamilton:

Hello. I'm Delegate Phil Hamilton from Newport News, and I'm joined today by Senator Jill Vogel of Fauquier County. We'd like to offer another perspective on transportation in Virginia.

Governor Kaine's most recent plan to increase taxes lacks a comprehensive vision for addressing the transportation issues facing Virginia today and in the future.

Relying solely on \$1 billion in higher taxes, Governor Kaine's plan adheres to outdated thinking that will only perpetuate the current status quo. Repeating the failed policies of the past hardly represents a solution for the present or the future.

A new statewide vision for transportation, with a focus on transforming the system, is long overdue. What we need is a transportation vision that directs resources to where they are needed the most.

Virginia's current and future transportation resources must be used for the preservation, renewal and replacement of an aging transportation infrastructure; the reduction of metropolitan congestion; ensuring safe and efficient mobility; and strengthening the economic competitiveness of the Commonwealth.

To accomplish these goals, the vision for transportation should integrate new strategies and innovative financing techniques such as tolling, congestion-pricing, and public-private partnerships, while directing existing resources to where they are most needed.

In meeting the goals of a transformed transportation system, the vision must be shaped by customer-oriented, performance-driven criteria. After all, the transportation system must address the needs of the people and businesses that use it, producing a network of different modalities that can be measured for efficiency, effectiveness, and safety.

We believe that an independent audit of existing VDOT operations must be conducted before taxes are increased for transportation. While some bemoan the lack of sufficient revenues for statewide highway maintenance, most are not aware that the current Administration classifies everything in the transportation budget – except for new construction – as maintenance.

What do expenditures for administrative operations and office supplies have to do with legitimate maintenance needs like filling potholes, repaving roadways, reinforcing bridge structures, and ensuring that tunnel walls are watertight?

Before declaring a maintenance budget shortfall, let's clearly define maintenance as the costs of necessary materials and the labor to get those materials installed. How much does a lane-mile of maintenance cost using this definition? Disappointingly, no one seems to know.

Before declaring that millions of increased tax dollars are needed for transportation, let's determine what funding is currently available from the primary traditional sources – motor fuels tax, vehicle titling tax, and vehicle registration fees, etc. – and project what funding might be available from tolls, congestion pricing, transportation concessions, and other potential public-private ventures.

Before Virginia imposes massive tax increases to address a claimed transportation budget shortfall, it is essential to: have a defined vision with specific, measurable goals and objectives for Virginia's transportation system; determine the cost to accomplish the vision, goals, and objectives; and determine the current and the potential revenues from all transportation financing strategies.

To date, Governor Kaine and his Administration have failed to comply with any of these simple and obvious standards. Once these steps have been accomplished, Virginians will have a tangible idea of what funding is needed to maintain existing transportation facilities, reduce congestion, and have a safer, more efficient transportation network.

Republican Perspective on Special Session II - Transportation

Until such a process is completed, Virginia will continue to do what it has always done and will continue to get what it has always gotten. This is neither progress nor a solution; it is the status quo.

Transportation transformation requires thinking and ideas that represent a new transportation paradigm for the future.

Virginia's transportation system needs proactive and progressive leadership for the future, not increased funding for an out-dated, unaccountable, transportation management bureaucracy from the past.

Senator Vogel:

Thank you, Phil.

Right now across Virginia, our citizens are dealing with one of the most challenging and uncertain economic environments since the months immediately following the September 11 attacks.

But you know that already. You know it every time you have to pay for a fill up at a gas station. You know it when you pass by a home in your neighborhood with a "For Sale" sign on the front lawn that's been there for months. You know it when drive by your local car dealership and see a parking lot full of shiny new vehicles with very few people looking to buy.

Yet, despite the price of fuel, and despite a home and vehicle sales market that are the worst we've seen this decade, legislators are back in session to consider proposals by the Senate Democrat Majority to raise the gas tax and Governor Kaine's plan to increase the tax on home and vehicle sales.

Unlike the special sessions called by Governor Baliles to address transportation, or by Governor Allen to abolish parole, or by Governor Gilmore to reduce the car tax, Governor Kaine has failed to build consensus or support for his plan before calling legislators back to Richmond.

During the six weeks since Governor Kaine unveiled the tax increase plan he detailed for you moments ago, he has held town hall meetings across Virginia to gain support for his approach. That strategy has not met with success, and there is no indication that the people of Virginia support his proposal.

During these six weeks, Governor Kaine has dismissed or discounted every conceivable idea to improve transportation that does not include massive statewide tax increases. He continues to push for higher taxes on car and home sales, and his fellow Democrats in the Senate still insist on increasing the gas tax.

Adopting a stance that virtually guarantees gridlock, Governor Kaine and legislative Democrats have made it clear they will not accept any transportation proposals that do not include massive tax increases. As a result, Governor Kaine now stands in the way of proposals to add transportation revenues without increasing taxes on Virginians.

During these days in Richmond, we could pursue innovative energy solutions, dedicating revenues to transportation. But Governor Kaine insists on tax increases. We could be enacting some of the innovative ideas we've heard on tolling or public-private partnerships. But Governor Kaine insists on tax increases. We could begin a thorough audit of VDOT, initiating a process that would ultimately make existing transportation tax dollars go farther. But Governor Kaine insists on tax increases.

In recent days, Governor Kaine has called for "adult" leadership. But what Virginia desperately need now is real leadership: leadership that respects the opinions of all, seeks to build consensus, and has an agenda that looks beyond gaining partisan advantage for the next election.

Republican legislators stand ready to provide that leadership. We are prepared to consider every reasonable proposal. We will cooperate with all parties to find consensus. But, we will not concede the best interests of the citizens whose voices we are entrusted to represent and whose interests we are here to serve.

Delegate Hamilton and I greatly appreciate you taking the time to hear our message this afternoon. May God bless all of you and the Commonwealth of Virginia.

###