A DEMOCRAT LOOKS AT THE 1968 VIRGINIA GENERAL ASSEMBLY

By JAMES M. THOMSON

The 1968 General Assembly continued the great strides of progress which began more than a decade ago. Under the leadership of an outstanding Democratic Governor, the Assembly moved into high gear.

In the 1956-58 biennium, the General Assembly appropriated from the State's General Fund $317 million for maintenance and operation and $62 million for capital outlay. A decade later, 1966-68, the General Assembly made available from the General Fund $981 million for maintenance and operation and $105 million for capital outlay. The table on this page shows the growth of the State's General Fund budget since the 1956-58 biennium.

The 1968 General Assembly appropriated $1.585 billion from the General Fund for maintenance and operation and $38 million for capital outlay for a total appropriation of $1.423 billion. In addition, the capital outlay appropriation was augmented by the authorization of $81 million in General Fund obligation bonds.

This progress has touched every field of State government and is reflected in the growth of the Commonwealth. During the 12-year period State appropriations from the General Fund for the public school system have risen from $139 million to $680 million and for higher education from $32 million to $294 million. The chief product of the State government is truly education; approximately 64 percent of our total General Fund appropriations are now devoted to education. Similar dramatic progress has been made in every field of public endeavor at the State level. Our progress as a State has been one of planned and well-developed programs, and this approach has saved our taxpayers millions of dollars.

In the 1968 General Assembly the membership handled more legislation than ever before. Almost 2,000 bills and resolutions were considered. Numerous measures of great weight were passed as a matter of course in this session without much controversy. The same could not have happened a few years ago, and in retrospect the vast majority of the proposals which were considered, with the single exception of the appropriations act, pale into insignificance when we consider the task before the Assembly in the special session scheduled for 1969 when we undertake the revision of the Virginia Constitution.

Perhaps the accelerated pace of legislative action reflects the lowering of the average age of the members of the Assembly. The average of a House member was almost 48, while the average age of a Senate member was 54. The combined average age of the legislators was just under 50 years. The Democrats had the youngest Delegate at age 30 and the oldest Senator at age 83. There were 86 Democrats and 14 Republicans in the House and 34 Democrats and 6 Republicans in the Senate.

The accomplishments of the 1968 Assembly can best be viewed in terms of (1) the general legislative enactments; (2) the appropriations act; and (3) the work created for the future. And I think it can be fairly stated that the measures are of importance in the ascending order set forth.

GENERAL ENACTMENTS

The general enactments were numerous and varied in substance. They reflect a determination on the part of the Democratic leadership to make this a better State in which to live and work. This determination was perhaps best reflected in the Governor's program. Governor Godwin had initiated so many important programs in the 1966 session that it was almost a full-time proposition to implement them and to enlarge the programs in 1968. As a consequence, the Hahn Commission report, which was adopted in part, came forward with the Governor's support as it was amended; thus a beginning was made towards solving our urban problems. The larger problems raised by that report must be solved by the commission created to revise the Constitution, or by the General Assembly. The Assembly followed the Governor's recommendation and agreed to utilize the bonding authority under the pay-as-you-go provision of our Constitution.

In the field of taxation the Assembly refused to expand the exemptions from the sales tax and imposed a local use tax for the benefit of the cities and counties. It imposed a tax on deeds which had just been repealed by the Federal government and shared the revenue with the localities on an equal basis. The $2,900 exemption

Virginia's General Fund Budget

(In Millions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maintenance and Operation</th>
<th>Capital Outlay</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1956-58</td>
<td>$317</td>
<td>$ 62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958-60</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960-62</td>
<td>461</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962-64</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964-66</td>
<td>625</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966-68</td>
<td>981</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
per week; these figures represent a 27.6 percent increase of more than one third in the General Fund. A great increase $1.4 billion will come from the General Fund, $12.5 from special funds, $53.3 million from revenue bonds, and $67.2 million from the proposed general obligation bonds. Operating funds for higher education amount to $204 million, an increase of 53.9 percent.

The construction of 7 additional community colleges was authorized under an appropriation of $117 million to be financed principally from general obligation bonds and resulting Federal matching funds. During the next biennium, 17 of the proposed 22 community colleges will be in operation or in the initial stage of organization. In 1970-72 the entire 22 colleges will be completed under the original Democratic program.

College faculty salaries will be upgraded with a five percent across-the-board salary increase. In addition, an allocation of $5 million has been made for salary adjustments. College libraries can draw on a $2.5 million appropriation to expand library resources. The budget also provides $14.5 million for teacher scholarships, $1.6 million for teacher in-service training, $90,000 for nurses’ education scholarships, $340,000 for additions to loan funds at the various institutions, $300,000 for regional scholarships, $1.5 million for undergraduate scholarships, and $500,000 for graduate scholarships.

Other Appropriations

In mental health the appropriations rose 28.3 percent to a total of $85 million. The proposed $14 million mental health general obligation bond issue will provide for 900 additional beds, including a new 500-bed hospital for the mentally retarded in the Northern Virginia area and another new hospital of the same nature in Southeast Virginia. The continuing development of our State program has resulted in two of our State mental hospitals being accredited.
In public health the big item of increase is Medicaid. The sum of $54 million, including $20 million from the General Fund, is allocated to this program in the second year of the biennium. The program will provide five services established by Federal standards: (1) inpatient hospital service, (2) outpatient service, (3) laboratory and x-ray services, (4) skilled nursing home and extended care, and (5) physician services. In addition, the State has made provision for clinics, prescribed drugs, home health care, and related services.

In the fields of conservation and recreation, a total of $3.2 million, including $1.6 million from the General Fund, was appropriated to continue the Democratic program to triple the number of State parks and to help complete the acquisition of land at Mason's Neck, False Cape, York River, and Smith Mountain.

Assistance to local and regional park authorities will be possible through a $1.4 million appropriation from the General Fund. The amount of $400,000 was set aside for land and construction of public fishing lakes and $150,000 was allotted for public access to rivers and lakes. Federal outdoor recreation funds will be available to supplement these State funds.

Virginia's growing export market program in agriculture was stimulated and streamlined with the employment of a full-time representative to promote this program.

The Assembly appropriated $714 million for highway purposes. Of this sum, $264 million will go to the Interstate System, $197 million to the State Primary System, including arterial highways, $127 million to the Secondary System, and $72 million to the Urban System. The arterial highway program is designed to provide 2,800 miles of 4-lane divided highways by 1975. Of this total, 1,200 miles are now open and 600 miles are under construction.

In the administrative field, the next Governor's salary was raised from $30,000 to $35,000, to commence in 1970, and $15 million was earmarked for the current biennium for salary increases and required overtime payments for State employees.

The new programs initiated by Governor Godwin are far-reaching in concept and will have a lasting impact on the Commonwealth. Even the existing programs have been given a great stimulus by the steps taken during the 1966 and 1968 sessions of the Assembly.

Additional Revenues Needed

During the next 2 years we can expect the economy to generate a 15 percent increase in our revenues. Yet, if Virginia's public services are to keep pace with Virginia's growth it is doubtful that the revenues from the present sources will be sufficient. In fact, it is apparent to many that Virginia may have to absorb a tax increase of major proportions in the 1970 session to keep pace with the growth of its institutions and the improved services which it continues to offer.

If we are to meet our commitment to Medicaid, to 22 community colleges by 1972, to the development of modern port facilities at Hampton Roads, to highways, to further accreditation of our mental hospitals, to expanded and improved education at all levels, to mention only a few, additional revenues of between $200 and $300 million will be needed by the Assembly in 1970. To meet this need the Revenue Study Commission was created by the 1968 Assembly.

The Future

While the 1968 General Assembly will be remembered for many things, most of all it will be remembered for the initiation of studies which will lead to the modernization of our State government in many critical areas.

The most important study will be undertaken by the Commission on Constitutional Revision. This Commission, which has already been appointed by Governor Godwin, has begun its deliberations under the chairmanship of former Governor and now Justice of the Supreme Court of Appeals, Albertis S. Harrison, Jr. This Commission is biracial and both major parties are represented. The Commission is to report to the Governor in January 1969 and the Governor has stated that he will call the General Assembly into extraordinary session to consider the constitutional changes recommended by the Commission. The General Assembly will then have to approve the revisions again in 1970 before the proposed changes are submitted to a vote of the people in a Statewide referendum.

The Commission approach to constitutional revision was taken by the Democratic leadership because it offered the most flexibility and the greatest opportunity for citizen participation at a minimum of cost. The minority party recommended the Convention approach. The wisdom of the plan adopted is reflected in the results which were obtained in New York and Maryland where the people rejected new constitutions. In both instances there was a failure of the convention process to recognize the needs of the state in relation to the changing times, and public participation was at a minimum. The Virginia approach under Democratic leadership will, I believe, develop the maximum citizen participation and bring forth amendments which will truly reflect the needs of Virginia and the will of our people. It is expected that one of the changes will be a provision to authorize longer sessions on an annual basis. The volume of the legislative work simply cannot be physically handled in a 60-day session each 2 years. This is reflected in the fact that we have averaged one special session during each of the past seven sessions. In addition, the longer annual session will allow more time for deliberation. For instance, amended bills may be printed and placed on members' desks before final action is taken.

Second only to constitutional revision is the Election Laws Study Commission. House Joint Resolution No. 73 created a 15-man commission with 8 appointed by the Governor, 4 appointed by the Speaker of the House from the House Privileges and Elections Committee, and 3 appointed by the President of the Senate from the Senate Privileges and Elections Committee. This group is also biracial and both major parties are represented.

The Election Laws Study Commission will report in time for the 1970 General Assembly. It has a difficult but very important task of not only eliminating the obsolete language and requirements, but of developing new safeguards for registering and voting. The problem is compounded by the Federal Voting Rights Act of 1965 which purports to circumscribe the right of Virginia to pass any election law changes. In 1970 it is believed that Virginia will be free from the effects of this act and will therefore be able to pass on the revisions recommended by the Election Laws Study Commission.

A third and very important study to be undertaken by the Commission on Legislative Processes is one which will be concerned with the legislative process itself. It will make recommendations on the necessary space, help, facilities, compensation, and expenses necessary for the
support of individual legislators and committees. Each legislator now has his desk on the floor and shares one, or at best two, secretaries with the rest of the members from his Congressional district; that and the paper and ink are the only aids offered the individual legislator. It is simply not possible for the members to handle the volume of business before the Assembly with the limited facilities that are available. Certainly, office space in a new building which would provide adequate hearing rooms should be considered.

An additional study to be made of the House of Delegates should add appreciably to the speed with which work can be handled on the House floor. The unnecessary time required for the formal approval or amendment of legislation only curtails the amount of time which can be given to committee work. Consequently, if the unnecessary and time-consuming steps in the legislative process in the House can be curtailed or eliminated there will be more time for actual work in the committees. One item alone, the adoption of a consent calendar, would provide significant relief. If a bill, after having been posted on the consent calendar for a week, is not called up for debate, it could be voted on in block with other similar bills. The rules of the Senate were revised in the 1968 session and Senators found a similar procedure to be most effective.

The General Assembly adopted a resolution providing for a study of Virginia's governmental needs for funds by the 15-member Revenue Resources and Economic Commission. It will be the job of the Commission to determine what revenues the State will need in 1970 and future years and the sources from which this revenue must come.

There are many other study commissions whose work will have long-range benefits. One will offer a study of the State's court system. Another will be an in-depth study that will chart the future of mental health. This study follows on the heels of the complete revision of the Mental Health Code by the Code Commission. A third study will offer recommendations for improvement of the Virginia Supplemental Retirement System and the Judicial Retirement System.

There are numerous other studies within and without the Virginia Advisory Legislative Council of great importance, but the major changes will nonetheless be encompassed in the far-reaching proposals which have been outlined above. Virginia has made great strides in every field of endeavor under strong progressive Democratic leadership. While there were areas in which the State had lagged, there were and are many areas where Virginia has led the way and still maintains a leading role. Too often our critics, in a totally negative approach, over-emphasize a shortcoming and ignore great progress which has been made. The net effect is to downgrade a State which has a great record of accomplishment. Programs are moving forward at every level under Democratic leadership to continue the expansion of the programs for Virginia to meet the needs of her rapidly growing population and to solve the problems of transition from a rural to an urban economy.

Note: Persons or institutions may be placed on the mailing list to receive copies of the News Letter by sending a written request to News Letter, 207 Minor Hall, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia 22903. It is suggested that the complete address be printed or typed, that individuals give their residential rather than office address, and that the Zip Code be included.

—The Editors