

The Problem with Regional Government

The problem with regional governments in Virginia is the combination of legislative, executive and judicial powers in one group of unelected and unaccountable politicians and bureaucrats. It's Taxation without Representation. It's an open invitation to corruption, even if it's the genteel Virginia Old Boy's Club way of getting rich off government.

The voters smell it, hate it and reject it. Politicians, especially Republicans more dedicated to power than principle, keep shoving it back in Virginians' faces. Republicans are going to try to make Virginia swallow Regional Governments in the Sep 27th, 2006 Special Session of the General Assembly.

Look at the Hampton Roads Regional Government proposals for example.

The Regional Transportation Authorities are "created as a body politic and as a political subdivision of the Commonwealth." They are Regional Governments.

Regional Government is an unelected government. They are a government of appointed officials elected separately to *different* public offices. No person runs for the office of Regional Government. No one faces the voters as the Regional Government potentate. It's contrary to our Virginia way where the city council and county supervisors, General Assembly and Governor are the only ones who can raise taxes – and they all face our votes.

The powers of government are centralized in one government branch. No divided powers. No separate and balanced powers. No checks and balances. It's opposite the genius of James Madison's U.S. Constitution and all the Virginia Constitutions.

The Regional Government has the taxing authority of the legislature for taxes, fees and "other charges imposed under the law" and to establish bylaws.

The Regional Government has the administrative and management authority of the executive to make 'all rules and regulations', to make contracts and manage the operations.

The Regional Government has the judicial power to resolve disputes and there is NO reviewing authority for policy and decisions.

None of this is needed to fix transportation problems.

Any member of the General Assembly could introduce a bill, say for the Third Crossing of Hampton Roads, and include adequate funding – tolls, revenue sharing from the General Fund, dedicated resources from the Transportation Trust Fund, etc. – and let VDOT manage the project. VDOT is accountable to the Governor and the General Assembly.

Or, if the delegate distrusts VDOT's management he could create an authority like the Bridge and Tunnel authority proposed by Del. Waldrup to collect revenue and build

projects. Except, Waldrup doesn't say what projects to build and he, like all the others, includes this killer paragraph:

*“To the extent funds are made available to the Authority to do so, to employ employees, agents, advisors, and consultants, including **WITHOUT LIMITATION**, attorneys, financial advisors, engineers, and technical advisors, and, the provision of any other law to the contrary notwithstanding, to determine their duties and compensation.”*

The politicians and bureaucrats of the Regional Government get the power to do as they please with the free money – with billions of dollars. The books may be checked by an accounting firm, but no one has a check and balance on the decisions made. No one reviews who gets the fat new contracts ‘without limitation’.

(If this passes, make me a member of the Regional Government! My family and friends will be set for life. No problem getting bank loans, special deals for cars, office supplies, jobs, etc. because of the billions in money handed out to ‘right’ contractors.)

The politicians get paid for serving on the new Regional Government plus they get per diem for working where they live. Good deal if you can get it.

Consider that the Jones, Oder, Iaquinto, Suit bill proposes building the same projects the voters rejected 2:1 in '02. The analysis of these projects (by the proponents themselves!) concluded that there would be MORE congested miles in Hampton Roads after 20 years of construction (and construction delays) than before. But, there is no accountability, no review, no appeal for such ‘stuck on stupid’ decisions. And, given the wit of local politicians, like the Hampton City Council who paid about \$7,000 @ chair for their new chairs and settled a \$5 m suit for improperly firing the city manager, there would be more costly disasters - and no recourse.

If a Regional Authority is needed to efficiently manage the collection of tolls and the maintenance of facilities, ok, but don't make it a government. Don't give it the taxing authority. Don't give it the legislative authority to decide what projects to do. Don't give it the executive authority to spend money to build a new layer of government bureaucrats and fat contractors. Don't give it judicial authority to rule itself and be free from accountability.

Politicians are hungry for Regional Government because it brings them unchecked power. Bureaucrats in dead end jobs get a new level of government that pays higher salaries. Friends and campaign contributors get billions from unelected and unaccountable government of appointed politicians.

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