



WILLIAM J. HOWELL
SPEAKER

TWENTY-EIGHTH DISTRICT

COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS:
RULES (CHAIRMAN)

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Speaker Howell Announces Latest Spending Cuts for VA House of Delegates Totaling \$2.1 Million in 2010

- \$1.0 Million in New Spending Reductions & Cost Savings to Help Address Current Budget Shortfall -
- \$1.0 M on Top of \$1.1 M in Already Authorized Savings to be Returned to General Fund in FY2010 -
- Virginia Now Ranks 46th in *Per Capita* Spending on its Legislature, Improving from 40th in 2003 -

RICHMOND, VA – As part of his ongoing commitment to leading by example to help state government tighten its belt just like families and business are doing during these tough economic times, Virginia House of Delegates Speaker William J. Howell (R-Stafford) today announced the latest round of budget reduction strategies being implemented by the Republican-led House of Delegates to generate savings to help address the current budget shortfall. The cuts and cost savings announced today by Speaker Howell total \$1.0 million in the current Fiscal Year 2010 budget and are in addition to the \$1.1 million in House budget savings already agreed to and enacted into law earlier this year.

“With Virginia families and businesses continuing to struggle in the wake of this awful economic recession, state lawmakers have a duty to undertake in the legislative branch the same type of cost-cutting efforts that are occurring not only around kitchen tables and in board rooms but in state government executive agencies,” said Speaker Howell. “The spirit of shared commitment and common obligation during these tough economic times demand that we take additional actions to further tighten our belt and reduce spending. The latest round of savings strategies that I have authorized for the House of Delegates will directly impact in ways large and small the daily business operations for every House Member and all House staff. Like government leaders at all levels, I understand that the current financial times are challenging for everyone. Yet, I believe current difficulties offer an opportunity for us, as taxpayers’ elected representatives, to be more creative in how we conduct the people’s business and more innovative in delivering results.”

The Republican-led House of Delegates, under Speaker Howell, has taken many steps over the last seven years to hold legislative spending down, reduce costs and increase efficiencies, while at the same time neither compromising the House’s institutional integrity nor inhibiting fulfillment of its important constitutional duties. For example:

- In 2003, the House economized and returned \$800,000 to the General Fund to help balance the budget;
- In 2004, due to additional operational efficiencies and cost-cutting measures, the House was able to revert an additional \$900,000 to the General Fund;
- Between 2005-2007, continued budget-saving strategies enabled the House to return \$2.0 million to the General Fund in June 2007; and
- By the end of the current fiscal year (2010), an additional \$1.1 million will be returned to the General Fund.

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In addition, the following new cost-avoidance and budget-saving strategies for the House of Delegates, totaling approximately \$1.0 million, have been approved by Speaker Howell to realize further savings in 2010:

- **Freeze Delegate & Legislative Assistant Session Expenses:** For 2010, a “per diem” rate of \$135 will be paid during session while conducting legislative business instead of the IRS-authorized rate of \$191 per day. This amount is 30% less than permitted by federal regulations and will generate a cost avoidance of \$640,000.
- **Revamp New Delegate Orientation:** The December 2009 New Member Orientation program was revised and reduced from 2½ days to 1 day, thus eliminating overnight hotel costs and meal expenses for the 20 new members of the House elected in November 3, 2009.
- **Enforce Standardized Meeting Schedule for Interim:** Legislative meetings will be scheduled on Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday of the first and third weeks of each month after the 2010 Session to allow members to attend more than one meeting on the same day, thereby reducing travel and compensation costs. The Joint Rules Committee, which the Speaker chairs, also included this in the 2010 procedural resolution.
- **Eliminate House Staff Positions:** An full-time equivalent position, and two Session employee position have been eliminated, as has funding for 10 House intern positions.
- **Restructure Session Staff Pay Practices:** Reduce or reorganize the payment for session secretaries and doorkeepers to better reflect work load.
- **Convert Constituent Viewpoint to Web-Based Application:** Create a Constituent Viewpoint web page on the General Assembly website in lieu of a staffed call center.
- **Streamline Session Printing Services:** Print publications in-house and limit quantities allowed before incurring charges; eliminate printing of bill packets for all members on House floor and reduce paper waste.
- **Revise Equipment Procurement Plans:** Eliminate use of long-term storage facility and auction unused items; revise maintenance coverage for office computer network; cancel replacement of computer server equipment; suspend planned upgrades of audio/visual and computer printer equipment.
- **Discontinue Other Services:** Funding for coffee for members and staff in the General Assembly Building has been eliminated, as has funding for cell phone service used by Capitol tour guides.

Beyond the latest cost-cuttings detailed above, there are other noteworthy on-going House savings strategies, the totals of which are *not* included in the \$2.1 million spending reductions announced today by Speaker Howell:

- **Delegates Pay:** The current and reduced delegate salary level of \$17,640 annually remains in effect. Prior to 1991, delegates and senators were paid \$18,000 annually. In May 1991, delegates agreed to reduce House members’ salary by 2% to its current level. Over the past 18 years, that delegate pay cut and lower amount than state senators pay has saved the Commonwealth a total of \$666,000 so far.
- **Delegate & Legislative Assistant Session Expenses:** Beginning in 2003 when he became Speaker, Speaker Howell began setting the daily in session meeting “per diem” paid to Members and one staffer conducting legislative business at rates substantially lower than the amounts authorized by the IRS. Over the past 7 years, this fiscal restraint has saved Virginia taxpayers more than \$765,000 so far.
- **Reduction in Full-Time Clerk’s Office Employees:** The Speaker oversees the House Clerk’s staff. Since 2003, six staff positions have been eliminated, which represents a 16% reduction.

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Since 2003 when Speaker Howell was first elected to his current legislative leadership position, the Commonwealth has improved its national rankings – dropping from 40th to 46th in the nation in *per capita* spending on its legislature, according to data compiled by the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), while remaining the 12th largest state in population.

For the current fiscal year (2010), the budget for the General Assembly and all legislative agencies is less than one-half of one percent – or 0.43% – of the total General Fund budget of \$15.8 billion.

“I have long made it a priority to aggressively reform House operations and reduce costs wherever possible,” concluded Speaker Howell. “While the new Governor and General Assembly will be facing numerous difficult budget-balancing decisions in the upcoming 2010 session, I am confident that an unbiased accounting of the record shows that the House of Delegates has done – and is continuing to do – its part to identify legislative branch savings, return those taxpayer dollars to the General Fund, and contribute to balancing the state budget.

“Going forward, House Republicans are ready to work with our counterparts in the Senate as well as Governor Kaine and Governor-Elect McDonnell to balance Virginia’s budget within the existing revenue constraints. Today’s announcement of \$2.1 million in cost-cutting in 2010 reaffirms the commitment of House Republicans to build upon the solid record of fiscal restraint and government accountability to taxpayers that we have worked so hard to accomplish since the people of Virginia first gave our now 61-member caucus a House majority over a decade ago.”

William J. Howell is the 54th Speaker of the Virginia House of Delegates. First elected a delegate in 1987, he represents the 28th House District which includes parts of Stafford County and the City of Fredericksburg. For more information regarding Speaker Howell, please visit his website – www.williamjhowell.org .

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