Journalistic Experience

Internship, EmPower Magazine; Washington, D.C. - Summer, 2013
- producing in-depth print and video stories on the socio-economic well-being of members of the African-American community throughout Richmond.
- Virtually submitting articles that are published online and available throughout DC, Maryland, and Virginia.

Correspondent, Capital News Service; Richmond, Va. – Spring, 2013
- Reported from the VA State Capitol on behalf of nearly 70 news organizations in the state
- Published print and online articles that were available throughout Virginia
- Produced stories as a contributing writer for the Potomac Local News and AOL Patch

Contributing Writer, Around the Horns Magazine; Richmond, Va. – Fall 2010-2011
- Produced sports features for the VCU Athletic Dept. Director of Creative Content, Chris Kowalczyk
- Worked closely with players, coaches, and staff from a variety of VCU athletic programs
- Published print articles that were featured in the quarterly edition of the magazine, and were distributed throughout the Richmond area.

Contributing Writer, The Highlander, McLean, VA-Fall 2008-2009
- Publishing stories for my high school newspaper
Working alongside the editor-in-chief to produce detailed articles on social issues facing teenagers

-Worked with the sports editor to publish articles on high school football and basketball games

**Education**

**Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Va.**

-Anticipated Graduation: May, 2013

-Major: Broadcast Journalism

-Minor: History

**Skills**

-Extensive knowledge with Sony XD-CAM, and editing programs (Adobe Premiere-Pro, Adobe Audition, Adobe Photoshop, Final Cut)

-Experience writing feature stories, hard news, and profiles for a variety of different news outlets.

-Photo-journalism and interviewing experience

-Extensive knowledge of social media and blog sites (Twitter, LinkedIn, Wordpress, ScribbleLive)

-Very good understanding of AP Style

-Ability to meet deadlines and work in a fast-paced environment without sacrificing quality
Higher ed advocates focus on retirement benefits

BY RVAN NEWS STAFF

By Michael Schuster | Capital News Service

While higher education issues seem hidden behind state gun control and uranium mining discussions at the Capitol so far, professors from VCU and other schools are urging legislators to improve retirement benefits for public university and college employees.

Pushing for more funding for higher education, better faculty retirement options and lower tuition for in-state residents, three groups spearheaded the task of getting their voices heard last week.

Officials from the Faculty Senate of Virginia, the VCU Faculty Senate and the American Association of University Professors met at legislative offices Thursday morning. Their first order of business was to push for educators' retirement benefits.

House Bill 1590, sponsored by Delegate Onzlee Ware, D-Roanoke, aims to create better retirement incentives for public higher education employees.

The bill would allow such workers, who currently have optional retirement plans, to opt in to the Virginia Retirement System. Employees who wish to maintain an optional retirement plan, and were hired after July 2010, would be provided between 8.5 and 8.9 percent “creditable compensation” from the Commonwealth. All other employees would be entitled to a rate of 10.4 percent creditable compensation from the state.

Creditable compensation constitutes all the salary and wages paid to a full-time, salaried higher education employee as a result of services performed. It also includes payments for compensatory time, severance pay or employer-provided payment for the purchase of service credit in the VRS.

The purpose of HB1590 is to give state employees in the higher education system the opportunity to purchase service credit in the VRS based on accumulated earnings and experience, even if those workers are covered under an optional retirement program.
“Many employees come in untenured, so they have a choice whether they want to participate in an optional retirement plan or the VRS, since optional retirement plans are portable and can be taken to other systems. But if you get here [Virginia] and you realize how great it is, then you might wish that you had signed in to the VRS,” said Robert Andrews, organizer of the 2013 Higher Education Advocacy Day.

“The bill makes it so down the road, once [employees] get tenured, they can make a one-time swap to buy equivalent amount of work time in the VRS,” said Andrews, a professor in the VCU School of Business and an officer in the VCU Faculty Senate.

“It’s certainly revenue neutral, and it’s really important for state employees to buy in to this established benefit plan.”

In addition to retirement benefits, education lobbyists are also looking to provide financial benefits to educators’ families.

**Senate Bill 1290**, introduced by Democratic Sen. John Edwards of Roanoke, would reduce the tuition rate for children of Virginia higher education employees by 50 percent. Currently, state universities and colleges can decide individually whether to waive tuition for their employees’ children. SB1290 would ensure that all state institutions implement the reduction immediately.

“Growing up with a mother as a college professor, you really gain a perspective into how valuable higher education is,” said junior Alex Wells of George Mason University. “I think that being proactive in the House and Senate really shows that we’re committed to the long-term prosperity of prospective students and faculty in Virginia.”

Participants in Higher Education Advocacy Day also expressed a need for more state funding to make college tuition more affordable for future students. Members are seeking legislative action to filter more than $200 million for state tuition assistance, as well as more than $2 billion in employer-based financing towards the VRS program.

“We’re important in supporting higher education and maintaining credibility against voices on the other side who feel that they don’t have any responsibility to contribute to higher education,” Andrews said.

“If we don’t have competitive institutions that have the financial resources to provide quality faculty members, or opportunities for students to have more feasible access to college, then we inevitably suffer in attracting professional businesses to our state.”

*photo by Tax Credits*
DOWN IN RICHMOND/Herring's Tax Credit Plan for Hiring Virginia Graduates Nixed

By Michael Schuster

RICHMOND, VA. – Students receiving degrees from Virginia’s public colleges and universities may struggle to find employment, after a House subcommittee killed legislation that would have given small businesses a $2,500 tax credit for hiring such graduates.

House Bill 1301 was introduced by Del. Charniele Herring, D-Alexandria, who proposed an incentive system for small businesses that hired people holding an associate’s or bachelor’s degree from a public institution of higher education in Virginia. In her eyes, small businesses are the cornerstone for moving graduates from the classroom to the real world.

"Small businesses account for more than 47 percent of employment to recent graduates, and it’s very important to provide tax incentives to encourage the hiring of our recent Virginia graduates," Herring said. "About 53.6 percent of recent higher education graduates have been unable to find a job, and that’s really what motivated me to pursue a way to give our students an opportunity to succeed after their education is complete."

HB 1303 would have helped small businesses that hire Virginia public college graduates to fill new full-time jobs after Jan. 1 of this year. Those businesses would have received a $2,500 corporate income tax credit for each new full-time position. Businesses could have claimed the credit after the graduate had been employed for at least a year.

Virginia college students supported the measure.

"I believe the tax credit ensures a move in a more positive direction and will encourage small businesses to hire recent graduates and help minimize the unemployment rates we’re seeing right now," said Alex Henery, a student representative from Radford University.

"If businesses are given a deductible to hire these graduates, then they may be more inclined to take a chance on those whose experience stems predominantly from the classroom."
The bill set a cap of $2 million for the tax credits. The tax credit program would have automatically expired in 2015.

HB 1303 did not cover private colleges and universities in Virginia. That is the main reason why House Finance subcommittee No. 3 decided to table the bill.

Herring argued that the financial ceiling set in the bill did not make it realistic to provide tax credits for hiring graduates from private institutions.

“I thought there was a more natural nexus for public universities, and with the money accessible, it’s not an effective tool in encouraging small businesses to hire all students who graduate from a college or university in Virginia,” she said.

Delegate Joseph Johnson, D-Abingdon, was intrigued by the bill. He noted that some parents are suing colleges and universities because their children could not find employment upon graduation.

For example, Trina Thompson, a 27-year-old New York graduate, and her parents are suing Monroe College in the Bronx for the $70,000 she spent on tuition because she has been unable to find a full-time job.

“There have been numerous class-action lawsuits brought on by parents whose kids have been unable to find jobs after school,” Johnson said. “Students majoring in visual arts, history, performing arts and English, to name a few, are finding it extremely difficult to find jobs. It’s becoming a new trend here in the commonwealth and throughout the nation.”

On a voice vote of 5-0 on Friday, the subcommittee tabled HB 1303, suggesting it be revised to provide tax credits for hiring graduates from private as well as public colleges.

Michael Schuster writes for Capital News Service
Senate Panel OKs More Stringent Voter ID

By MICHAEL SCHUSTER

Capital News Service

RICHMOND - The Senate Privileges and Elections Committee has approved a bill that supporters say would thwart voter fraud but opponents say would make it harder to vote.

The committee voted 8-6 along party lines Tuesday for a bill that would limit the number of acceptable forms of voter identification – the types of documents someone must present in order to cast a ballot.

Currently, voters can identify themselves by presenting a voter registration card, a driver’s license or various other documents. House Bill 1337, proposed by Delegate Mark Cole, R-Fredericksburg, would remove utility bills, bank statements and paychecks from the list of documents that would be accepted at polling places.

By a 63-36 vote on Feb. 5, the House of Delegates passed a substitute version of HB 1337. That version added a provision that the acceptable forms of ID must be “current and valid” and “contain a photograph or the name and address of the voter.”

After approval by the House, the bill then moved to the Senate. On Tuesday, the Senate Privileges and Elections Committee endorsed the bill. All eight Republicans on the panel voted for the bill; all six Democrats voted against it.

HB 1337 now will be considered by the full Senate.

Cole said he believes the only way to prevent voter fraud is to narrow the forms of ID Virginians can present at the polls.

“In previous years, the numbers of acceptable forms of identification have been far too broad. I thought it was necessary to tighten up the list to more acceptable forms of ID,” Cole said. “By requiring a photo ID, we can help to curb deceptive practices.”

However, his bill has drawn opposition from advocates for elderly and low-income Virginians, who tend to vote Democratic and are less likely to have a driver’s license or other photo ID. Critics see the bill as a bullying tactic to prevent certain people from voting.

Delegate Jennifer McClellan, D-Richmond, told the Fredericksburg Free-Lance Star that HB 1337 would hurt older and less fortunate Virginians.

“There are people – mostly elderly, many of them but not all poor – who do not have any of these IDs that will be left, because they don’t drive anymore or because they don’t have a valid driver’s license,” McClellan said. “All they have is the voter registration card sent by the state.”
Under HB 1337, Virginia residents still could present voter registration cards and Social Security cards as acceptable forms of ID on Election Day.