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- [**My Initial Thoughts on the Budget**](#) - My thoughts on why the 5.5% tax increase should be dead on arrival and some common sense measures we should be looking at to address the budget shortfall.
- [**More Progress on I-66**](#) - Two exciting pieces of news as I continue to work to address one of our most congested corridors - I-66. The start of the project to dynamically use the shoulder lanes during periods of congestion and the study that I hope leads to an Express Lanes project on I-66 in the very near future.
- [**Fairfax OKs Sign Enforcement**](#) - Last week the Board approved agreement with the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) that would allow the County to clean up illegal signs and fine offenders on behalf of VDOT in accordance with state code. The agreement passed with a vote of 8 to 2 and is the culmination of over a year's worth of hard work to rid this blight from our community.
- [**Budget Town Hall**](#) - Yesterday's "snowstorm" canceled my plans for the budget town hall. We will be publishing a new date soon. The budget town hall will give residents an opportunity to hear a presentation on the budget and better understand how Fairfax County is spending their money. Representatives from the Department of Management and Budget and I will be available to answer your questions and hear your thoughts and suggestions.

My Initial Thoughts on the Budget

In a 9 - 1 vote at Tuesday's Board of Supervisors meeting, the Board approved advertising the tax rate for FY 2014 at \$1.095, a 5.5% tax increase that I believe should be "dead on arrival". If imposed, this would be the single largest tax hike, in both the tax rate and the real estate tax bill, since Gerry Connolly controlled the Board and doubled homeowners' taxes.

This proposed increase comes at a time when our homeowners are struggling under the continued threat of sequestration. When our homeowners have a reduction in earnings due to the economy or furloughs, they do not have the luxury of increasing "revenue", they must adjust their spending and we as a board should do the same.

The budget shortfalls should come as no surprise. For the last several years, our current and former County Executives have warned of \$100 million plus shortfalls for the next four years that we would need to address. Some of our local leaders have said that we were out of the "great recession" and continued to grow spending. Truth is we haven't seen a recession compared to the rest of the country. Now we face great uncertainty due to the impact of sequestration and the dependence of the region on the federal government.

I firmly believe that out of these challenges come opportunities. As the Board has heard me say many times before, taxes doubled when times were good between 2000 and 2008. In the interim years, instead of giving real relief, we have trimmed around the edges and failed to implement common sense cost-cutting measures. Now, we must make the tough decisions we have been putting off.

I believe we can reduce our spending while keeping the high level of services that our residents enjoy and expect. This will require a mix of small and large measures. Some of the common sense measures I have proposed and continue to endorse include:

- **Focusing School Resources Into the Classroom on Teachers and Kids:** For the last several years, the growth in the budget has been largely driven by the growth in the transfer to schools both in total dollars and as a percentage of the budget. Our schools are among the best in the nation and we must invest to keep them there. However, instead of focusing the resources into the classrooms, the size and salaries of central administration and non-school based positions have grown excessively.
- **Let Our Teachers Teach:** The growth of administrative and non-school based positions have resulted in new additional "programs" and administrative programs for teachers. Now we have a large number of teachers doing nothing but administration. If you take the total number of students in the school system and divide it by the number of full time equivalent teachers (excluding principals, guidance counselors, special education teachers and other non-teaching school based staff) you should get average class size. If you do the calculation you get a class size of 12. This is less than half of our average class size. What are all these teachers doing? Administration.
- **Independent Audit Function for the School Board:** It is hard to continue to transfer additional resources to a Superintendent and a School Board majority that continues to resist an independent audit function. Despite the requests of teachers unions, parents groups, school groups, myself and other Board of Supervisor and School Board members, schools have repeatedly failed to establish an independent audit program which would be 100% accountable to the School Board and therefore the citizens, not the Superintendent and his staff. The

County's Auditor to the Board of Supervisors provides a great model that has more than paid for itself with its findings - it is past time for a change.

- **Pensions:** The private sector figured out more than 30 years ago, traditional pension plans, with a defined benefit, are simply not sustainable. However Fairfax County has been slower to come around to this truth. In the last 10 years, our pension funding level has dropped from over 90% to 70%; necessitating general fund dollars to be pulled out of parks and libraries to keep the funding levels sufficient. In addition the work force has changed and our new young employees are less interested in pensions which are not portable .We need to reexamine converting our defined pension plan to a more modern, defined contribution plan such as a 401(k) for new general county employees.
- **Healthcare and Wellness:** Another driver of tax increases is the cost of maintaining health insurance for County employees. In the last year, our health insurance premiums rose over 13% (75% more than national large employer averages). With the new healthcare law going into effect in 2014, that number is only going to rise, and rise significantly. Last Fall I proposed contracting with a wellness program provider in order to begin reducing our long term healthcare costs by incentivizing employees to take proactive steps to live a healthier lifestyle. Studies show that a program of this type can have as much as a 3 to 1 return on investment. In Loudoun County, a wellness program was enacted 3 years ago and savings are already being realized. Since 60-80% of healthcare claims are the result of lifestyle choices, incentivizing good choices should be an integral part of any well-managed healthcare plan.
- **Growing our Commercial Tax Base:** A broad and diverse commercial tax base is critical to the health of our economy. For every \$1 paid by a commercial entity, only \$0.60 in services are used by that entity. This means that residential taxes are being subsidized by commercial entities; allowing residential taxes to remain low. Decades ago, the Board of Supervisors set a goal to have commercial taxes comprise 25% of total real estate taxes collected. While we have reached that goal in the past, in the current budget we are only at 19%. We need to improve our efforts to attract new businesses, work to retain current businesses and ensure we are not converting too much of our remaining development to residential.
- **Competitive Sourcing:** We need to look at which functions that are currently performed by the County that can be competitively outsourced - lowering current cost, eliminating future pension liabilities, and improving service. One simple example that can save millions is the outsourcing of the trash collection at government office buildings.
- **Focus our Resources on Those Truly in Need:** I believe we should be focusing our housing and other safety net resources on those truly in need. Subsidizing housing for those making \$70K to \$130K a year should not be the role of government. The recent program to register and help our homeless that are sleeping in the woods is.

The 2014 budget will also require some new measures and tough decisions and I have a citizens' budget review committee working hard at analyzing the budget. Please let me know your thoughts on the budget and taxes. I appreciate your thoughts and ideas.

We already know we are facing four more years of shortfalls. I look forward to working with my colleagues on the Board to address those challenges. I believe it's time we refocus on our priorities like public safety, schools, and helping those most in need, and not balance the budget on the backs of our taxpayers or employees.

More Progress on I-66

When I first took office in 2008, I laid out a four point plan for I-66 and got to work with VDOT to get them done. I am pleased to report that we are closing in on the final two points. The four points are:

- **Extended HOV Hours** - this has been done and is in place.
- **Opening the Ramps at Monument and Stringfellow to Non-HOV Traffic During Non-HOV Hours** - after a long fight and with the help of VDOT and Congressman Frank Wolf we got this done and the ramps are open. At the request of a citizen, I have recently asked VDOT to re-look at the possibility of making the ramps two-way based on the approval of similar ramps on the I-495 Express lanes. I expect they will continue to see this as a safety issue but will report back as soon as I hear.
- **Opening the Shoulder Lanes During Periods of Congestion** - Like the ramps, the shoulder lanes are existing infrastructure that should be used to ease congestion. It is unsafe to have the shoulder lanes open when traffic is moving at the speed limit because there is no breakdown lane. VDOT was not able to dynamically open the shoulder lanes and traffic congestion on I-66 is unpredictable (I know - it is always congested) so they had been looking for federal and state funding to upgrade. They were able to identify funding last year and I am pleased to share that Governor Bob McDonnell and Secretary Sean Connaughton just announced that construction of the Active Traffic Management (ATM) project for a 34 mile stretch of I-66 from Washington D.C. to Haymarket will begin this spring. This will involve new emergency pull-off areas, as well as the addition of dynamic message signs, ramp meters, sensors, and new traffic cameras. In addition to allowing shoulder lane use during periods of congestion it will allow both VDOT and public safety authorities to quickly identify and respond to incidents, and provide detailed traffic information to travelers. For more information on this project including a video simulation, visit VDOT's website at http://www.virginiadot.org/projects/northernvirginia/i-66_atms.asp
- **Restarting the Environmental Impact Study (EIS) To Address the Long Term Congestion Problems** - Without this study a long term solution to congestion would not be possible. I began an effort to get the EIS restarted in 2008. It had been started in the late 1990s but was stopped in 2004 although still funded. Thankfully Sean Connaughton got the study restarted as one of his first actions when he became Secretary of Transportation. The draft EIS is now complete. With the draft EIS complete we can now look to the private sector to come up with a solution for the corridor and provide real congestion relief. What

I hope we will see is a solution like the I-495 Express Lanes that will provide immediate congestion relief, provide transportation choices (transit, carpool, free lanes or pay for an express trip) and a way to pay for the project while preserving a corridor for potential rail expansion. A Public Hearing will be held to seek public input on the findings of the Tier 1 Draft EIS:

- Wednesday March 13th 2013, 6-9 p.m. at the Four Points by Sheraton, 10800 Vandor La., Manassas, VA 20109
- Thursday March 14th 2013, 6-9 p.m. at the Luther Jackson Middle School, 3020 Gallows Road, Falls Church, VA 22042

For additional information on the study and the Draft EIS, please visit the study's website: http://www.virginiadot.org/projects/northernvirginia/i66_eis.asp.

Also, thanks and congratulations to VDOT on completion of the repaving project on I-66.

Board OKs Sign Enforcement

Last week the Board approved an agreement with the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) that would allow the County to clean up illegal signs and fine offenders on behalf of VDOT in accordance with state code. The agreement passed with a vote of 8 to 2 and is the culmination of over a year's worth of hard work to rid this blight from our community.

I initially brought this issue to the Board's attention in December of 2011 asking the Board to endorse a change in the Virginia Code. At that time the Virginia Code imposed certain limitations on Fairfax's authority to remove political signs from VDOT rights-of-way that did not apply to any other County. With the help of Delegate Dave Albo this "Fairfax exception" was removed from the State Code.

Since the change in the state code a combination of self-enforcement by both political parties and their candidates and increased enforcement by VDOT, including the assessment of fines, have resulted in a significant reduction in illegal sign blight. This next step will provide the County the ability to remove signs and assess fines.

Budget Town Hall

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