Excerpt, State of the Commonwealth Address
Governor Timothy Kaine
January 9, 2008

Introduction
Mr. Speaker, Mr. President, Members of the General Assembly, my fellow Virginians:
It is with great pride in our shared history that we return tonight to our historic Capitol. This Capitol is entering its 220th year of service, as home to the oldest continuous legislature in the New World.

...My friends, when we transcend our differences and work together for the common good, the state of the Commonwealth is very strong.

Best State for Business
In the past year, the whole world watched as we recognized the 400th anniversary of the founding of America, right here on Virginia soil. The anniversary gave us the chance to recommit to a tradition of excellence in public service that is a hallmark of our history.

... Virginia was named the best state for business in the nation this year by Forbes.com, CNBC, and other business publications. We have one of the lowest unemployment rates in the nation, our average wages are among the highest, and with your support for the Governor’s Opportunity Fund, we announced the creation of over 15,500 new jobs in 2007. Just yesterday, we started 2008 off with a great economic development victory. RTI will invest $100 million and bring 150 high-paying titanium processing jobs to the Martinsville/Henry County region.

Virginia's per capita state and local tax burden as a percent of income ranks 43rd one of the lowest in the nation and our per capita income is the 9th highest in America. Our fiscal stewardship has been rewarded with rare Triple A ratings by all three major bonding agencies.

According to Education Week, children born in Virginia have the best chance of life success of any children in the nation. Ten Virginia high schools made Newsweek’s top 100 high schools list, and three of Virginia’s public universities are ranked in US News and World Report’s top 100...

Pre-K
...We have been affected by the cooling national housing market and too many Virginians face the threat of foreclosure. Rising oil prices, tightening credit requirements, and a turbulent stock market continue to make the economy volatile, and we will monitor the situation closely.

The Virginia economy is still expanding, but at an uncharacteristically slow rate. Since 1980, our average growth rate has been 7.5%. In fiscal years 2008 and 2009, projected revenue growth is less than half of that average.

Economists believe that the Virginia economy will emerge from slower growth beginning next year. But, to be conservative, our FY 2010 forecast, reached after consultation with industry leaders and legislators of both parties, is nearly a full
percentage point below our historic norm.
The tight budget requires careful scrutiny of every dollar we spend. We need to ask
tough questions about everything we do. We have to adhere to our tradition of fiscal
responsibility and make ourselves accountable for our taxpayers’ dollars.

...The best way to grow our economy is to support an education system that will
expand opportunity and prepare our workforce for the jobs of tomorrow.

Having an outstanding education system does not mean that there is not room to
improve. And we know a lot more today than we did 50 or even 10 years ago, which
means we can make even smarter investments to prepare our children.

For example, current research shows that 90% of brain development occurs before a
child turns 5.

We know that children who attend high-quality preschool are more likely to finish
school, find good jobs, and are less likely to commit a crime.

We also know that if a child is unable to read by the third grade, his or her chance of
success throughout the rest of school is dramatically reduced.

...This is an investment in our Commonwealth’s future. We must make it now so that
our children can become the firefighters, police officers, teachers, delegates,
senators, and governors who serve the next generation of Virginians...

**Higher Education**

Continued support and improvement of our K-12 education system will make a
difference in how prepared our students are when they leave high school. But we
have to acknowledge that, in the global economy of today and tomorrow, a high
school degree is just not enough.

We must encourage our high school graduates to continue their education at
universities, four year colleges, career and technical schools, and community
colleges. And we need to give those institutions what they need to serve students
who will ultimately become the workforce driving Virginia’s economic engine.

Making significant new investments in higher education will also help create high-
tech jobs through research and innovation. This is particularly important at a time
when job growth is slowing...

**Illegal Immigration**

Securing the Commonwealth’s future also means that we must set aside political
rhetoric and carefully address the most complex and challenging issues we face
like illegal immigration.

We are a nation of laws. It is our obligation to enforce those laws, and we should
continually assess the consequences of illegal immigration.

It is equally important to recognize the many positive benefits of legal immigration.
We cannot afford to let supercharged political rhetoric unfairly paint a picture of
Virginians as a people who are hostile to New Americans.

The debate about illegal immigration needs to begin with a recognition of steps we
have already taken.
Virginia law already prohibits any person who is not legally in the country from receiving state or locally funded benefits, with only a few exceptions, like education, emergency health care and care for contagious diseases.

When a Virginia State Trooper comes in contact with a person suspected of being in the country illegally, he or she contacts Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Eighty percent of those reports made since March 1st of last year have resulted in ICE beginning deportation proceedings.

The state police also participate in regional task forces that target violent gang activity by illegal immigrants.

The Virginia Department of Corrections notifies ICE of any foreign-born offender who is convicted and placed in state custody. Our Department of Motor Vehicles works hard every day to scrutinize drivers’ license applications to determine whether people are lawfully in the Commonwealth, and our Virginia Guard helps patrol the border between Arizona and Mexico to help federal enforcement agents. Virginia has done much to pick up the slack for broken federal immigration policy.

There will be more proposals on immigration this year, and we should scrutinize them carefully. In doing so, we have to balance the need to enforce our laws with a few important realities.

One in ten Virginians was born outside of the United States, and most of us can trace our ancestors back to another country in only a few generations. The majority of immigrants today are legal and fully contribute, strengthening the social fabric of our communities.

Our Jamestown commemoration recognized the positive and transforming power of immigration and of those that welcome immigrants. Immigration continues to invigorate our culture, provide new energy to our economy, and expand our view of the world.

Did you know that, in 2007, foreign companies announced over $750 million of investments in Virginia, creating over 2000 new jobs? Many of these jobs were created in parts of our Commonwealth that are hungry for economic development. We are in fierce competition for those jobs, and we cannot afford to give the world the impression that Virginians are not willing to engage with people from other countries in global commerce.

And it’s not just about new business opportunities or foreign investment in our communities. Many long-time Virginia businesses, especially in the agricultural sector that still represents the largest part of our economy, are dependent on immigrant workers. We should not punish law-abiding businesses or hinder their ability to grow and create jobs.

In this critical area, as in all others, we have a responsibility to go beyond sound bites, to take the debate seriously, and to spend the time it will take to craft a balanced response to our challenges.

"For the People"

Every day, the hard work of wrestling with difficult questions about our policies reminds us that we were sent here to serve.
We should also remember who we were sent here to serve.

Jefferson believed that our government belonged to citizens, not to politicians or to special interests. To guarantee the continued ownership of this government by its people, we must always look for opportunities to safeguard and improve citizen participation.

This year, to help ensure that our government is by the people, we should stop narrowly limiting the reasons for which voters can request absentee ballots, and allow any qualified voter who cannot get to the polls on Election Day, regardless of the reason, to use an absentee ballot. And we should allow absentee ballots to be delivered electronically to those Virginians who are serving our country overseas.

We should also help guarantee that our government truly is of the people. Over the decades, both parties have used the drawing of legislative lines for partisan advantage, to the disadvantage of our citizens and communities.

Our legislative districts should be drawn with the people, not the politicians, first in mind. It is time to create a bipartisan system for redistricting. With different parties in the majority in each house, now is the perfect time to make this necessary change.

And finally, to help ensure that our government is for the people and not for a few insiders, we should take steps to keep our campaign finance practices transparent.

To make our contribution disclosure system work, we must close the loophole that allows designated contributions to go unreported. The voters deserve to be able to see past the groups that simply collect the money and know the real sources of those campaign contributions.

**Transportation and Abuser Fees**

Finally, part of serving people is by showing that we truly listen to them.

Last year, we crafted the first significant infusion of funds into our transportation system in two decades. After years of inaction, we supported a compromise plan that increased rail funding statewide by over 60%, increased funding for public transit operations by over 40%, expanded funds for road construction at both the state and regional levels, and made significant advances in land use planning along the way. We are moving on projects again—projects that would still be gathering dust on shelves if we had failed to act. We can celebrate this achievement.

But one part of our transportation package clearly is not working. The imposition of higher fees on drivers who commit serious traffic offenses was designed to both increase transportation revenue and encourage safer driving habits.

After six months, neither goal has come to pass. The abusive driver fees will not generate the amount of revenue we had hoped. And neither the number of traffic tickets issued nor the tragic number of deaths on Virginia highways last year indicate that the fees have improved highway safety.

Virginia citizens in huge numbers have told us that the fees should be repealed. We should listen to them. I hope that this session, you will send to my desk a bill fully repealing the abusive driver fees.

We must continue to look for strategies to promote safety on the road. And, the
maintenance needs of our road system have to be addressed. But, the abuser fee idea has flunked with our voters and we should acknowledge it and move on.

**Conclusion**

I know you will suggest ways to improve on the proposals I have put before you today. I look forward to a civil exchange of ideas, always keeping the needs of our citizens foremost in our minds. As Jefferson wrote to John Adams, "Truth between candid minds can never do harm."

You will also offer many proposals of your own, and I pledge to engage with you in good faith about your visions for Virginia's future.

We have much to look forward to this year. There is no greater honor than for each of us to play our part in continuing and improving the legacy of enlightened self-government that has enlivened this Capitol for 220 years. Virginians have sent us here with high expectations. If we work together, we will not disappoint them.

Thank you, and may God bless our Commonwealth.