

# COMMUNITY NEWS

## 2012 LEGISLATIVE PREVIEW

# 7 players to watch in Richmond

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RICHMOND — The Virginia General Assembly returns next week for a 60-day session to consider thousands of bills and pass a two-year state budget. After November's elections, Republicans secured tenuous control of the state Senate and a commanding majority in the House of Delegates. It is only the second time since the Civil War that the Republican Party has had control of both chambers and the governor's mansion.

**1** The session marks the most critical for Gov. Robert F. McDonnell (R), who is asking legislators to pass his first budget and approve priorities that include job creation, pension reform and K-12 education.

The governor has worked across the aisle during his first two years in office, on issues such as transportation and higher education. But in his first two sessions, he was frustrated by a Democratic-controlled Senate that killed proposals to expand the number of charter schools and divert existing money to ease traffic congestion.

With a Republican majority, his chances improve for getting his priorities passed, although it could also lead to a politically sensitive environment for him as the larger conservative wing of his party might want him to take on hot-button issues that he has largely avoided.

Other key figures to watch when legislators return Wednesday:

### **2** LT. GOV. BILL BOLLING

The Republican lieutenant governor, who has the tie-breaking vote in the Senate, should have greater power and visibility now that the chamber is evenly split between Republicans and Democrats. His state position officially remains a part-time one. (Bolling, 54, has a second job as an insurance company executive.) But even before the 20-20 Senate split, Bolling was doing more than the ceremonial duties usually associated with lieutenant governors. McDonnell made him a member of his Cabinet and designated him the state's chief jobs creation officer. With McDonnell's support, Bolling is running to succeed the governor in 2013. But first he'll have to get by Attorney General Ken Cuccinelli II in a Republican primary. Watch for him to try to make the most of his time in the tie-breaking spotlight, even as Democrats plan to challenge his authority on certain matters.



### **5** SEN. DICK BLACK

The new senator from Loudoun County represents a new crop of Republican candidates elected to the General Assembly this year. Like Black, they are social conservatives who focused on creating jobs during the campaign but are expected to revive legislation on abortion, guns and immigration that died in the Democratic-led Senate in the past. A lawyer, Black, 67, was one of the most conservative members of the House, serving for eight years until he was defeated in 2005. He is probably best known for sending plastic pink models of fetuses to lawmakers as they prepared to vote on an abortion bill. Black easily won his Republican-leaning district in Loudoun and Prince William counties — one of two new districts in the state — after the 2010 Census showed a spike in population in Northern Virginia's outer suburbs.



### **6** DEL. LACEY E. PUTNEY

The 83-year-old independent from Bedford is the longest-serving member of the Virginia General Assembly. As chairman of the powerful House Appropriations Committee, he is the sponsor of his chamber's version of the budget and a key player in negotiating the differences between the spending plans of the House and Senate. Putney, a lawyer elected as a Democrat who supported school segregation in 1962, represents Bedford City and Bedford and Botetourt counties. He left the party five years later and joined the Republican caucus as an independent in 1998. He briefly served as speaker in 2002 after House Speaker S. Vance Wilkins Jr. resigned, following revelations that he had paid a staff member to keep quiet about "unwanted sexual advances." In 2007, Speaker William J. Howell (R-Stafford) tapped Putney to lead the Appropriations Committee, though the move was a bit controversial because he is not a Republican.

### **3** SEN. THOMAS K. NORMENT JR.

The moderate James City Republican was just reelected as his party's leader in the Senate, despite talk before the elections that he might be replaced with someone more conservative. Democrats dispute that Republicans have control of the chamber, but Norment's party declared him majority leader, giving him the power to make committee assignments and decide which bills come to the floor for a vote. Having served two decades in the Senate, Norment, 65, sits on the powerful Finance Committee. He also works as a lawyer at Kaufman & Canoles and as a professor at the College of William and Mary. Norment is known around the Capitol for his vibrantly colored shirts and ties, folksy stories and quirky voice mail greetings.

### **4** HOUSE MINORITY LEADER DAVID J. TOSCANO

The Charlottesville Democrat was chosen to lead his party's caucus in the House after its leader, Ward L. Armstrong, lost his reelection bid when Republicans eliminated his district during redistricting. Several Democrats were interested in the post, but Toscano, 61, quickly emerged as the consensus candidate in part because of his calm demeanor on the House floor. He was elected unanimously by his peers last month. Toscano, a lawyer, former mayor and City Council member, has represented Charlottesville and Albemarle County in the House since 2006. He and his fellow Democrats face a challenge this session. In the 100-member House, Republicans now hold a hefty 68-seat majority, the highest in Virginia history.

### **7** SEN. RICHARD L. SASLAW

The 71-year-old Democrat from Fairfax County has been in the Senate since 1980 and rose to majority leader four years ago, when Democrats took over the chamber. He has continued to use the majority leader title even after November's elections as he and other Democrats have maintained that Bolling's voting authority is limited and that Republicans won't have full control of the Senate. Saslaw, a blunt-talking gas station magnate who jogs to stay fit, ridiculed some republican candidates last fall as "nut jobs." But he often joins Republicans to support the interests of developers and big business, including payday lenders.

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