

The Session is now quickly winding down, and most committees will finish their work by the end of this week. Increasingly, the focus is on the state's biennial budget.

Budget

Last week, I wrote exclusively about the state's budget. This week, budget conferees are named. They are Senators Colgan, Houck, Howell, Saslaw, Stosch and Wampler and Delegates Putney, M. K. Cox, Landes, Jones, Sherwood, and Joannou. These six legislators are responsible for merging the House and Senate budgets into one compromise budget that the General Assembly can pass on to the governor's desk. They must complete this daunting task before the General Assembly adjourns sine die (from the Latin for "without day", meaning adjourning a legislative body at the end of the legislative session without assigning a date for the body to reconvene) on March 13.

Bipartisan Redistricting

SB 173 (Deeds), the last opportunity to set up a bipartisan redistricting commission prior to the 2011 redistricting process, died in a House of Delegates Subcommittee this week. The Senate of Virginia and the House of Delegates will devote significant time during the 2011 session drawing new legislative districts for themselves and also for Virginia's Congressional districts.

Chinese Drywall

Several legislators brought forward bills that deal with Chinese drywall. The last of these, SB 298 (J. C. Miller, died in the House Commerce & Labor Committee this week. SB 298 sought to prevent insurance companies from failing to renew homeowner's insurance policies due to the existence of Chinese drywall in the insured home. The McDonnell Administration has put together a task force to look into problems caused by Chinese drywall and recommend solutions for impacted homeowners.

Chinese drywall with high levels of sulfuric compounds are thought to corrode copper piping and wiring and contribute to respiratory problems, particularly in children. It is estimated that this drywall exists in 350 residences, mostly in Hampton Roads.

"Amazon" bill

The so-called "Amazon" bill that sought to force internet retailers with a physical presence in Virginia to collect the state sales tax died in a House subcommittee this week. Proponents claimed that the bill would've taken a step towards removing a competitive advantage internet retailers have over brick & mortar retailers – the fact that internet retailers are not required to charge sales tax. Opponents of the bill worried the bill would cost the state up to 5,000 jobs.