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At Session's End Loudoun Delegates Report Back From Richmond

LEESBURG
Today

By Danielle Nadler/ reprinted from Leesburg Today

A handful of state lawmakers representing Loudoun County made their first public appearance Tuesday morning since the General Assembly session came to an unofficial end.

Sen. Mark Herring (D-33), Del. Joe May (R-33) and Del Randy Minchew (R-10) spoke at John Marshall Bank's Legislative Business Breakfast, held at Tuscarora Mill in Leesburg. And each held a different viewpoint on how the 60-day session went.

The three will return to Richmond next week to vote on a final version of the two-year \$85 billion state budget, drafted by six negotiators from both chambers.

Minchew, who is in his first term, said while it was difficult to work under the notion that there would be no tax increases, there was more partisan compromises than the media outlets let on.

"I found that there was a lot of bipartisanship, and a spirit of brotherhood, down there," he said.

May, who's in his 10th term, added that he is thankful, and Loudoun residents should be thankful, that the legislators representing Loudoun works together fairly well.

While Herring agreed that the Loudoun delegation works well together, he had a very different take on the session as a whole, calling it the "most contentious" he has experienced in his seven years in the Senate.

"It perhaps reflects a difference of perspective or perhaps a report from a different chamber," he said.



On day one, Herring added, Republicans took more than their fair share of the power on Senate committees. "My concern was it would bring a hyper-partisan atmosphere, and I think most people in Virginia take some pride in the fact that at least in Richmond we're more civil than they are in Washington."

The lawmakers' varying perspectives shouldn't come as a surprise as the Republicans in the House enjoyed a comfortable majority, while the Senate was split 20-20, and votes along party lines held up versions of the budget.

During a follow-up question and answer session, the morning's conversation settled on the need for more transportation funding for Northern Virginia—one issue on which each of the lawmakers, as well as apparently most the 50 or so individuals in attendance, agree.

Minchew asked everyone at the breakfast whether they would support a raise in the gas tax if the revenue was

used to improve transportation. Nearly every hand went up.

The three men spoke about their disappointment that the spending plan expected to pass when the assembly reconvenes next week includes only small efforts to increase revenue for transportation—one which allows the Virginia Department of Transportation to sell the naming rights for the state's bridges and highways in order to generate funds.

"This year, to be frank, they really didn't bring home the bacon," Minchew said, adding that the gas tax has not been raised since 1986.

One person asked whether the Loudoun delegates agree on the need for more state funding for the Dulles Rail extension to the county. The latest version of the two-year budget scraped \$300 million in additional money for the project.

"All of us agree that Northern Virginia is not getting its fair share of transportation funding," Minchew said. "And all of us believe that rail service to the airport is critical."

"Do we all support putting additional money into Dulles Rail? I'd say yes," May added.

Herring, who was a leading proponent of the \$300 million rail allocation, said he does not plan to support a budget that does not provide at least some funding for the rail project.

"I'm not going to throw in the towel. I'm going to keep fighting for our fair share."

Minchew's comments summed up the trio's desire to answer the region's transportation needs—and soon. "The amount of budget Loudoun is getting for transportation is rapidly approaching zero. There's going to come a day that we're going to have to really wake up and smell the coffee, and I don't know when that's going to be, but I believe that day of reckoning is coming, and I prefer to do some preventative work."

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