

A Report from PTA Day at the General Assembly - Monday, January 26, 2009

As a representative of Colin Powell's PTA, Patrice Mortson attended this special day when key state government leaders warned that it's not a matter of whether funding for public K-12 education would be cut but how much and how. Gov. Timothy M. Kaine and Sen. R. Edward Houck, 17th-Spotsylvania, who leads the Education Committee and serves on the Finance Committee addressed attendees at the annual PTA Day at the General Assembly.



Speaking to a nearly full audience in Richmond City Hall's council chambers, the two agreed that K-12 education funding would have to feel the budget pain in a souring economy. But Kaine and Houck disagreed how.

The governor's budget calls for cuts in funding for school support personnel, saying that funding for this group of employees has never been capped in the Standards of Quality budget funding formula as it has for classroom funding. As costs continue to rise, he said, and revenues continue to fall, this funding area will start impinging on classroom funding if caps in his budget are not imposed.

Sen. Houck told the gathering, "we've never dealt with anything like this before," but he said he differed from the governor on how to accomplish the needed cuts. He opposes any cuts to the Standards of Quality, what he called "the core" on which state funding is decided. He also called for "local flexibility" in deciding what needed to be done to operate with fewer state tax dollars.

Virginia PTA President Melissa S. Nehrbass said that while "these are scary times, the PTA is committed to preserving the state funding formula, insisting that cutting that area amounts to permanent cuts in K-12 education, even when the economy rebounds. She reminded the group that Virginia PTA consists of 350,000 members whose volunteer efforts to advocate for public education comes from personal commitment, not a lobbying check.

Attendees at PTA Day also heard from three Annandale students involved in DECA, the Distributive Education Clubs of America, in a public service project to raise awareness about child abuse and to urge Congress to reauthorize the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA).

They also were briefed on current General Assembly bills of interest to Virginia PTA. In addition to the budget, they included bills addressing setting school calendars, background checks for handgun sales at gun shows involving private transactions, indoor clean air and pedestrian sidewalk safety.

Following the briefing, attendees went to the Capitol to meet with legislators to discuss issues of interest before attending a General Assembly session.