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### **REMARKS BY VEA PRESIDENT MEG GRUBER**

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, and thank you for the opportunity to brief you on a topic so important to the Commonwealth and its citizens.

As we approach crossover, and the House and Senate finish perfecting their respective bills, the focus is turning to the budget. This is the time when the budget conferees will be making tough decisions, as each chamber prepares its budget for presentation on the 21<sup>st</sup> of this month.

What we ask is that when those tough decisions are made, the budget that they adopt puts our students and our public schools first.

The students in Virginia public schools are—quite literally—the future of this great Commonwealth. This budget should send a clear signal that we are moving away from the cuts in school programs and jobs following the Great Recession and we are ready to make an investment in our schools and in our teachers reflecting this belief.

I speak on behalf of the 50,000 members of the VEA when I say this, but I am also happy to say that the public is squarely behind the need to improve our funding of public schools.

According to a telephone poll conducted on our behalf in January, by more than a 2-to-1 majority Virginians say that public schools do not have the funding right now to meet their needs.

Seventy-four percent of the public say that the amount of funding affects the quality of a student's education either "a great deal" or "quite a lot."

You see, the public gets it. They understand that educators will do everything they can to offer a quality education when our Commonwealth faces a financial crisis such as we had during the Great Recession. Every one of our members has been asked to do more, as we have some 11,000 fewer education jobs filled now than before the Great Recession, when you take today's larger student enrollment into account.

Members of the House and Senate deliberating the budget will be demonstrating how much of a commitment they are prepared to make toward the future of our children.

....And they need to know that, as it stands right now, Virginia is 41<sup>st</sup> in the country on the state's funding of public schools....

....They need to know that Virginia teachers' pay is more than \$6700 under the national average....

....They need to know that when Rutgers University ranked all the states on the wage competitiveness of its teacher pay compared to other professions, Virginia ranked worst in the country....

Our economy is beginning to come back, and Virginia is beginning to add more good jobs in high-tech and other fields. How ironic it would be if our teachers—the dedicated men and women who give students the foundation to excel in these new jobs—lack their own career pathway with adequate salaries and security.

We cannot simply expect large numbers of young people who are leaving college with thousands of dollars of loan debt—and have so many other options open to them—to flock to the teaching profession.

Again, the public recognizes the problem. In our poll, 73 percent of Virginians said they thought teachers were not being paid enough.

Historically, when Virginia has made progress on teacher salaries, the state played a major role. At one point Virginia was just a few hundred dollars under the national average. But when you look at the state share of teacher raises over the past eight years, what you see is a string of zeroes with two years of less than a 2 percent increase.

We need our elected leaders today to make a serious investment in those who have achieved so much in our schools.

The members of the VEA will be speaking out about school funding and teacher salaries, and the members of this General Assembly will be hearing from us.

We're also reaching out to the public with a campaign of radio, television, billboard, and online advertisements alerting the public to the need to support better funding for our schools. You can see samples of the billboards here and other components of the ads at our website, [www.veanea.org](http://www.veanea.org).

One last thing I wanted to brief you on, and that is the question of the Constitutional Amendment that would take the authority for Charter Schools from a locally-elected school board and give it to 9 of the Governor's appointees in Richmond. VEA has opposed the measure for some very good reasons. We have spelled them out in the handout in your packet, but you really need to know one thing:

This amendment would mean that this unelected state board could require any school division in your region to build, to staff, and to administer a charter school, regardless of your local needs, financial issues, or priorities.

That's a recipe for problems, as other states have discovered.

And it's also a distraction from the real issue, which is the General Assembly's retreat from its Constitutional mandate to ensure a quality program of public education in our Commonwealth. I would

refer you to the excellent editorial in the Virginian-Pilot that ran last week, and is included in your packet, which made this point very clearly:

The members of this General Assembly must show leadership and vision as they decide what kind of support they are going to give to our students and our teachers and other public educators. It is time to invest in Virginia's future.