

## Week in Review: Medicaid expansion kicks up concerns

By Bre Payton

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This week in Virginia, a "Family Values" PAC targeted an underdog candidate, while transportation executives have no salary limit under a new commission.

A study argues spending more on students doesn't improve SAT scores, and the debate over the Medicaid expansion is kicking up concerns.

This is your week-in-review.

More money doesn't necessarily translate to more successful, college-ready students.

A new study by the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank in Washington, D.C., finds that, adjusted for inflation, per-pupil spending from 1972 to 2012 has soared 120 percent in Virginia.

But SAT scores have remained virtually stagnant. In fact, when adjusted for participation and demographics, Virginia's SAT scores actually fell by 3 percent.

A liberal "family values" PAC is targeting Republican state Delegate Bob Marshall's campaign for Congress — while staying mum about the presumptive GOP front-runner.

Virginia Family Values PAC was launched in 2005 with the goal of "defeating key legislators who promoted the intrusion of government power into the private decisions of couples and families in such matters as contraception and private sexual relations."

Delegate Barbara Comstock is widely seen as a favorite — if not the favorite — in the GOP's April 26 firehouse primary. But the McLean Republican is not mentioned by the leftist "Family Values" PAC.

On Tuesday, the PAC tweeted: "Contribute now to help Virginia Family Values PAC stop anti-family radical Bob Marshall!"

Gov. Terry McAuliffe will have the final say on a measure that could saddle Hampton Roads taxpayers with an unlimited tax burden.

The General Assembly approved HB 1253 and its Senate version, SB 513, which would establish a commission of 21 appointed members to oversee transportation projects in the Virginia Tidewater area.

The bill allows the Transportation Accountability Commission to hire a chief executive, without limits on how much he or she would be paid.

Virginia hospitals are behaving like hypochondriacs jonesing for a stronger Medicaid fix.

While warning of financial doom if the state fails to expand the indigent-care system, hospitals' revenue and hefty six-figure executive compensation packages point to healthy bottom lines.

A tax document obtained by Watchdog revealed the Virginia Hospital and Healthcare Association paid its president, Laurens Sartoris, \$553,082 in 2011. The industry lobbying group's top three executives earned more than \$1 million combined that year, the latest year for which data is available.

As citizens, lawmakers and health care representatives debate whether to expand Medicaid in Virginia, they've talked little about how that could increase the number of people receiving other taxpayer-funded benefits.

A social services director told Watchdog.org that staff members are encouraged to shepherd Medicaid recipients into other government benefit programs.

When a person signs up for Medicaid at a local Department of Social Services office, or online, they're also directed to other programs they might be eligible for — like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly food stamps, or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, the most basic form of welfare.

A vast majority of Virginians — even likely voters who generally support Medicaid expansion — say they believe their personal health care costs likely will go up if the program expands, according to a new poll by a free market-oriented group.

While Virginians were pretty split on the issue — 42 percent of those polled are in favor, 41 percent are against — they tended to think expansion will involve some sort of sacrifice, according to the March 7-9 poll of 469 likely Virginia voters conducted by Campaign Management Services for the Foundation for Government Accountability.

More than 56 percent of likely Democrat voters said their health care costs are “somewhat likely” or “very likely” to increase with Medicaid expansion, while 87 percent of likely Republican voters and 68 percent of likely independent voters said the same. All political groups were also less likely to support expansion if it would take away funding from schools, infrastructure and public safety.