



VA Week in Review: Everything but the budget

By Kaitlyn Speer

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ALEXANDRIA, Va. — Gov. Terry McAuliffe has just a few days to sign a budget and avoid a state government shutdown. And while the deadline is pressing, he has chosen to focus his attention on other things this week, namely giving Virginia taxpayer money to a financially strapped company and another Chinese company that could receive state incentives. Here is your week in review:

Five non-budget-related things McAuliffe has done this week

By law, the governor has a seven-day window to sign into law, reject or amend any budget passed by the General Assembly. Since the Legislature-passed budget — which leaves no room for Medicaid expansion — reached his desk Sunday, McAuliffe only has few more days to make a move.

While his deadline is pressing, McAuliffe has chosen to spend his time and exert his efforts elsewhere. Here are some of the things he considered a priority this week:

1. Granting nearly \$1.2 million to a company that was investigated by the feds and reported a \$197 million loss in net income in the first quarter of 2014.
2. Holding a reception to celebrate LGBT Pride Month.
3. Announcing a huge shipment of chicken to China.
4. Announcing a new Chinese plant in Chesterfield County that may get lots of incentives from the state.
5. Announcing a lot more board appointments — to things such as the Cemetery Board.

Virginia hands taxpayer money to financially strapped Alcoa

McAuliffe announced Tuesday that Virginia will give Alcoa Power and Propulsion nearly \$1.2 million in taxpayer money. The company plans to invest \$25 million in the city of Hampton to create 75 new jobs.

“This deal is just one in a long line of sweetheart deals made between the commonwealth of Virginia and businesses,” said Nicole Kaeding, a budget analyst for the Cato Institute. “Unfortunately for taxpayers, these sort of deals are mutually beneficial for policymakers and businesses. The policymakers get to say that they brought jobs to the area, while businesses get to operate with lower costs.”

Products from Pittsburgh-based Alcoa are used in jet engines and industrial gas turbines. The company generated \$23 billion in revenue last year, but according to a company financial statement it reported a net income loss of \$197 million after taxes this first quarter. The Department of Justice and the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission investigated the company earlier this year.

Bus cameras aim to protect children, but at what cost?

Redflex Traffic Systems of Australia is partnering with 19 Virginia school districts, installing cameras on buses to catch drivers who ignore their stop signs.

Evidence of violations gathered by Redflex, including video and high-resolution images, is sent to local law enforcement to review and determine whether a violation occurred and whether a driver should be cited. Redflex prints the citation and mails it to the car’s registered owner.

But is it Redflex’s job to issue such a citation?

John Whitehead, president of The Rutherford Institute, a nonprofit civil liberties organization, doesn’t think so.

“(It’s) not a state organization, not the police,” Whitehead said. “What you’re dealing with ... it’s a huge money-making scam. It’s trying to find ways to make monies off of the average citizen who makes mistakes. I’ve driven by buses all my life. I’ve never seen anybody ignore a stop sign.

“It’s the corporate police state. (If) they’re going to do that, which I oppose by the way, there has to be some kind of screening device,” he said. “If a bus drives through a neighborhood, it can pick up all kinds of information. They’ll be watching everyone.”

With new ALPR restrictions, more than Cantor’s defeat makes Ashland distinct

Last week, the tiny town of Ashland, Va., made headlines after Dave Brat, a little-known economics professor at Randolph-Macon College, took down U.S. House Majority Leader Eric Cantor. Brat’s Democratic opposition for the 7th House District election in November will come from a fellow Randolph-Macon professor, Jack Trammell.

But Ashland is also known for something else — the concern of the Ashland Town Council for personal liberty and privacy, and that town police chief’s prioritization of transparency. Ashland now has one of the strictest data retention policies in the state when it comes to the use of automatic license plate readers.

They’re not retaining the data at all.

“It’s an opportunity to collect data on people that honestly really isn’t our business to collect,” Ashland Mayor Faye Prichard told Watchdog.org. “If you committed a crime or potentially

committed a crime, we are certainly out investigating you. But collecting data because you might potentially maybe in the future commit a crime, that's not something that we're doing. Even for 24 hours, it rides a really gray line getting into other people's privacy. And I think we can do our job without doing that."

"It's more than likely not going to hurt anybody if we kept the data, but I think we're all uncomfortable with the precedent that it sets and the sort of big brother state," Prichard added.