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## News

### Mr. Jones goes to Richmond, with soda and M&Ms

By Holly Hobbs

Capital News Service

RICHMOND - Among the stacks of legislation on Del. S. Chris Jones' desk in the General Assembly Building are Mountain Dew cans, Gatorade bottles and an M&M dispenser.

The sodas and candy keep him going during the Assembly's long hours, but food is also a focus of his legislative agenda this session.

"I'm one of the chief patrons on accelerating the phase-out on the tax on food and groceries," said Jones, a 46-year-old Suffolk native who has served in the House since 1998. "It's been a goal for years to get rid of that because it affects everyone."

Virginians pay a tax of 4-percent on food -a total of about \$150 million a year. For years, many state officials and citizens voiced interest in eliminating the tax, Jones said. To do so, however, the General Assembly must find other sources to make up for the lost revenue.

Jones said he knows how difficult budget and tax issues can be. He served during the General Assembly's 2004 session, which lasted a record 113 days because of a budget impasse. The long session finally came to an end when Jones and 16 other Republican delegates defied the House GOP leadership by voting for a tax increase.

Jones said he's hoping this year's 46-day session will be short and sweet.



"I think this session is going to be a lot calmer than last year," he said, adding that the "overwhelming majority" of issues before the General Assembly are not partisan.

"We've got a lot of issues that go along regional lines. For the most part, we look at what's in the best interest for Virginia. That's what our challenge is - to come up with the best solution for Virginia," Jones said.

However, he has stocked up for the possibility of a longer session than anticipated.

His legislative aide, Susan Clark, points to the reserve of more than 50 cans of Mountain Dew in a corner of her office. She said the office consumes cases of the soda during the session.

"I don't mean we," Clark said. "He goes through the stuff ... I don't know how he drinks it. Yuk!"

The walls and cabinets of Jones' office sport pictures of his daughter, other relatives and retired Celtics forward Larry Byrd. Perched on top of a 6-foot high cupboard are various stuffed animals and Beanie Babies.

"The frog's name is Smoochy," the delegate said, pointing at the green and yellow frog atop the cupboard. "That's what I've always called my daughter. She doesn't really like it when I point that out, but yeah.

"You see all the elephants? And of course, I've got my little Beanie Baby bears."

A small purple bear, wearing a pink sash, sits between Smoochy and another large stuffed animal. It is a Relay For Life Beanie Bear, part of the American Cancer Society fund-raising campaign.

"My mother died of cancer," Jones said. "I always try to keep things that help out with cancer research."

His office contents might look whimsical, but Del. Jones is all about business. Serving on four committees and six subcommittees, he says he has a full plate.

"We rely on the committee system here, and we rely on each other," he said. "You can't understand all the issues and the intricate detail of how derivatives work or financing. So the committee system is something that works very well here, and I think it's served us well."

In Suffolk, Jones is a pharmacist, and he has put his occupation to work in the Legislature.

"I have some bills that I'm carrying for the Board of Pharmacy," he said. For example, one bill would help the board ensure the safety of prescriptions being filled by pharmacies outside Virginia.

Jones said it is important that legislators hear from their constituents to know what they like and dislike.

"You know it's always good hearing from back home," he said.

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