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A December to Remember

By Michael W. Thompson

1/6/2011 – December 2010 could well go down as a dramatically important month in modern Virginia history. The coming legislative session will be a distant memory with two other issues still scoring points with Virginia's citizens.

First, the legal challenge by Virginia to the national health care reform legislation received a huge boost when Judge Henry Hudson ruled in favor of the argument made by Attorney General Ken Cuccinelli. The argument being that the federal government has no constitutional authority to force citizens to purchase health insurance or any other commodity.

Soon after being sworn-in Ken Cuccinelli filed this legal challenge to Obamacare. The new Attorney General was considered by many to be a young, brash, inexperienced, press hungry gunslinger who did not have the legal grounding or experience to succeed in this case. Well, that all changed on Monday, December 13th when Judge Hudson ruled that Cuccinelli was indeed correct and that it is unconstitutional to force Americans to buy health insurance.

So the Virginia Attorney General's stature in Virginia and in the country received a huge boost. And Governor McDonnell was helped as well in his national reputation – he supported this legal challenge and signed into law the bill that gave the Attorney General the avenue for this court suit. Those who know Henry Hudson know he is a solid and serious thinker, not prone to political decisions and his ruling on this case was thoughtful and clear. Virginia's challenge was the first court case in the national effort to derail Obamacare that achieved legal success. It was a huge victory.

A huge victory came to Governor McDonnell just a few days before the ruling by Judge Hudson, when he announced a dramatic decision to pour \$4 billion into the transportation needs of Virginia. We all know that our state faces some serious congestion problems in Hampton Roads and Northern Virginia, that we need to improve our major economic corridors – I-95, I-81 and I-64 – and that we must build the needed transportation network to move cargo out of our internationally recognized port. Not meeting the port challenge could result in a loss of a great deal of business over the next few years – a huge mistake. And business leaders around the nation considering relocating to Northern Virginia are very aware of the huge congestion problem in that part of the state.

So without raising taxes, and moving previously approved bonds to the forefront, the Governor has sent an important message to the business community and to commuters. He understands that we have to spend money to build a modern transportation system and we can do it without raising taxes and without jeopardizing our Triple A bond rating.

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And a few days after announcing this \$4 billion investment in transportation the final of four audits of the Virginia Department of Transportation was released. This audit dealt with the management process inside VDOT and it clearly showed that much needs to be improved. This audit was contracted for by the Governor and VDOT Secretary Sean Connaughton, providing them with a road map to bring modern business practices to the way VDOT functions so that the money spent by VDOT achieves more results and results that count.

As mentioned at the beginning of this column, December 2010 could go down as incredibly important to those of us living here in Virginia. The legal ruling calling the major funding source of Obamacare unconstitutional puts Virginia in the national spotlight and proves that our Attorney General is not what his opponents were saying a year ago. Indeed, he has shown he is a smart constitutional attorney who has put knowledgeable and capable attorneys around him in the Attorney General's office. The ultimate ruling will come from the Supreme Court. In the meantime, the Cuccinelli/Hudson interpretation of Obamacare will keep Virginia in the spotlight.

And as the Governor's \$4 billion transportation program is used to move current transportation projects forward, relieve congestion and boost our economic stature, McDonnell has shown that a major campaign promise is being kept – he is confronting our transportation needs with billions of dollars without raising our taxes. Not bad.

These two dramatic announcements will make December 2010 an important month in the history of Virginia – and in the political biographies of Bob McDonnell and Ken Cuccinelli.

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Michael Thompson is Chairman/President of the Thomas Jefferson Institute for Public Policy, Virginia's premier independent public policy foundation. These views are his and do not necessarily reflect those of the Institute or its Board of Directors. He can be reached at info@thomasjeffersoninst.org.