

Business Development Caucus:

“Virginia is the best state to do business in and getting better.”

By Brennan Long

Four freshman Delegates joined together to form the first Business Development Caucus in Virginia’s General Assembly. Delegates Mike Watson (R-James City), Chris Head (R-Roanoke), David Ramadan (R-Loudoun) and Michael Webert (R-Fauquier), all business owners employing Virginians recently founded the caucus to introduce legislation to promote entrepreneurship and job growth in the Commonwealth.

“The four of us had had frequent casual conversations about our own businesses and realized that among all the Caucuses in the GA, there was not one focused on business development,” Delegate Watson said. Senior Delegates Joe May (R-Loudoun) and Terry Kilgore (R-Gate City) are serving as advisors to the Business Development Caucus, which carries the support and endorsement of both Governor Robert F. McDonnell and Speaker William J. Howell (R-Stafford). “The Business Development Caucus has formed in keeping with Virginia’s tradition as a place where opportunity exists for anyone who takes a risk and puts their God-given talents and time to work,” Governor McDonnell said. “The Business Development Caucus will also partner with my Year of the Entrepreneur initiative in our shared mission of growing opportunity in the Commonwealth. I applaud freshman Delegates Ramadan, Webert, Head and Watson and committee chairmen Terry Kilgore and Joe May for taking the initiative to form this caucus and look forward to seeing the results of their efforts.”



The four founders of the Business Development Caucus: (From left) Delegates Webert, Head, Ramadan and Watson tour Dulles airport during a Loudoun BDC event.

In addition to an enthusiastic response from the governor, the Caucus also received offers of full support from the Virginia Chamber of Commerce, Americans For Prosperity, the National Federation of Independent Business and similar organizations, all of which stand willing to facilitate the Caucus’s efforts. “I think it’s a great idea for these Delegates to draw upon Their experience as employers to help other Virginia businesses Create new jobs,” Speaker Howell said.

Though the Delegates differ in their business backgrounds—Head in healthcare, Ramadan in international franchising, Watson in manufacturing technology and Webert in agriculture—they have encountered many of the same challenges, from infrastructure and employer mandates to regulation and taxes, among others. “Businesses face a wide range of issues that limit their ability to invest and grow,” Delegate Head said. “The four of us shared our own business experiences, including the unique challenges that come with meeting payroll, and determined that we needed a mechanism for bringing these concerns to the forefront.”



(From left) Delegates Head, Watson, Ramadan and Webert at a BDC event in Richmond.

The BDC Mission is to promote practical business legislation to facilitate startups, growth and success of Virginia businesses. Their strategy is to visit locations around the state to host Business Town Hall meetings, getting direct input from business owners and leaders. “After 30 years of working with high-tech firms and manufacturers, most of it as a business owner, I’ve seen what draws business and what drives it away,” Delegate Watson said. “With our new caucus, we can use our own experiences and ideas from other companies to pass legislation that will promote business success and job growth in the Commonwealth.”

The Business Development Caucus has conducted six town hall style meetings in Roanoke, Hampton Roads, Loudoun, Culpeper, Richmond and Danville. All four delegates attended the meetings along with representatives from the governor’s office. Over 130 companies were represented at the meetings and the Caucus leaders learned about issues including taxes, permits, workforce development, Virginia Employment Commission and Home-based businesses. Ideas generated at these regional meetings, will lead to legislation which Caucus members will guide through the legislative process in the 2013 session, enhancing the outlook for Virginia’s job-creators. “This is why we ran for office,” Watson said. “We now have a group of experienced employers working together with a clear mission: Promoting business success and job creation in the Commonwealth.”

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