

## **McDonnell: No tax hike for transportation**

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Attorney General Bob McDonnell said transportation continues to be a "critical issue" in the state, but alternatives other than raising taxes should be utilized to tackle the problem.

Those alternatives, he said, include spending money more wisely on state programs, including the Virginia Department of Transportation, land-use reform and allowing localities in high-density areas, such as Northern Virginia and Tidewater, to provide funding for their own transportation needs.

Part of last year's transportation package would have given that initiative to localities, but the measure was ruled unconstitutional by the state Supreme Court.

McDonnell, who was in Rocky Mount Friday afternoon, said Gov. Tim Kaine added amendments to that package, which in the end were responsible for the ruling.

"We must find creative solutions (to the transportation funding shortfall) before considering a tax hike," he said.

McDonnell, who has already raised more than \$1.2 million for his expected gubernatorial race in 2009, said he voluntarily cut 5 percent from his own office's budget as a way to offset the state's budget shortfall. Other agencies have done the same at the request of Kaine.

But, McDonnell said even with all the cuts, there have been no deficiencies in state services.

"It (the cuts) had no impact at all," he said, adding that this was a good example of how state government can cut spending and still do its job.

With the state struggling to meet its transportation costs, McDonnell said such projects as the proposed Interstate 73, which would cut through Franklin County, and improvements to U.S. 58 are impacted but could become a reality at some point.

If the majority of residents support I-73, he said he would push for it as well.

"I would defer to local judgment on that," he said.

On the gas crisis, McDonnell said the country cannot continue to get 70 percent of its fuel from "countries that are not friendly" to us.

"We have to wean ourselves from that dependence," he said, adding that he supports presidential candidate Sen. John McCain's plan to lift the moratorium on offshore drilling and invest in alternative energy sources, such as wind, solar, coal and nuclear power. He also favors tax credits for alternative energy research.

"We can drill safely now," he said, pointing out that improvements in offshore sites have meant that disasters, like hurricanes Katrina and Rita, had little impact on production.

But, he said, neither the federal nor state government should interfere with the free market price of gasoline.

"The feds need a comprehensive energy plan," he said.

McDonnell said rail transportation should also be utilized, and if high-speed rail were available, it would be used.

"Clearly, that (rail transportation for goods as well as people) should be part of the plan," he said.

Before being elected attorney general in 2005, McDonnell represented the 84th District in the House of Delegates for 14 years.

As attorney general, he has worked to pass new laws targeting sexual predators, established an online Sex Offender Registry, worked to combat gangs, formed a youth Internet Safety Task Force, led the effort to pass anti-dog and animal fighting legislation, joined with the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to deport alien sex offenders, and led efforts to pass private property protections, among other initiatives.

McDonnell is the presumptive Republican nominee to run for governor in 2009, saying he will run on a ticket with Lt. Gov. Bill Bolling, who will seek re-election to that office.