

Arlington, Alexandria consider legislative priorities

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Body

Opposition to a new mandate that requires local governments to cover state responsibilities, loss of local funding sources and possible immigration laws are among **legislative** issues under consideration by **Arlington** County and **Alexandria** officials.

At meetings Saturday, officials from the jurisdictions discussed their **priorities** for the 2011 General Assembly session.

"We are concerned about how the General Assembly is changing its commitment to local governments," said Patricia Carroll, **Arlington's legislative** liaison. She said that the state once returned about half of its revenue to municipalities, but that in the past three years, the percentage has been 42 percent.

Jurisdictions could face more financial trouble because of a report from the Governor's Commission on Government Reform and Restructuring, which suggests legislators **consider** repealing the business, professional and occupational license tax, or BPOL tax, and the machinery and tools taxes.

Alexandria's BPOL tax provides about \$30 million to the city, "a very impressive source" of funding, said Bernie Caton, **Alexandria's legislative** liaison. That number is near \$60 million in **Arlington**, Carroll said.

She said new funding sources would have to be identified to replace the tax revenue.

Officials from the jurisdictions decided not to support any legislation that might resemble Arizona's immigration law, which criminalizes illegal immigration by defining it as trespassing and allows local law enforcement agencies to question people they suspect of being undocumented. Both jurisdictions support in-state tuition rates for all high school graduates, including undocumented students.

Immigration "is a federal issue [and] states have little authority," Caton told the City Council and **Alexandria** delegation at a **legislative** meeting last week.

Del. David B. Albo (R-Fairfax) has drafted bills dealing with immigration that are being supported by Dels. Jackson H. Miller (R-Manassas) and L. Scott Lingamfelter (R-Prince William).

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Richard Merit of **Alexandria** said at a public hearing that he supports a proposal by Del. David L. Englin (D-**Alexandria**) to raise the cigarette tax to help fund programs to keep young people from smoking. **Alexandria** officials support the bill, and, Carroll said, **Arlington** officials have not taken a stance on it.

Arlington has requested legislation to renew the transient occupancy charge that funds convention and visitors services. The county also has requested a bill to ensure online travel companies pay the tax based on their Virginia bookings.

"A lot of our **legislative** suggestions will help all the jurisdictions in the state," said County Board member Barbara A. Favola (D).

A 5-cent tax on plastic bags, use of more federal funds for senior programming and meals, more transportation funding, support of pretrial release programs for jails and state affordable housing funds are also among issues **considered** for legislation.

Alexandria officials approved their **priorities**, and **Arlington** officials are expected to approve theirs next month. The jurisdictions' delegations have yet to schedule public hearings on the proposals.

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