

## Many Numbers Point to Needs

Challenging times as we commemorate vision of Martin Luther King Jr., inaugurate new governor.

**U**nemployed, uninsured, homeless, hungry. While on a percentage basis, Northern Virginia is better off than most of the rest of Virginia, in raw numbers, we have more people here who are unemployed, more people here who lack health insurance, more people who spend parts of most months without enough food on the table, more people who are homeless.

Some sobering numbers as we celebrate the day of hope and aspiration that is Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Sobering statistics as we inaugurate a new governor who has many good ideas, but no plans for new revenue. Cuts in the state budget will affect everyone in Virginia, even those who are not needy.

In November, more than 68,000 unemployed people were looking for full time work here in

Northern Virginia, according to the Virginia Employment Commission, up from just under 50,000 in November, 2008.

Later this month, officials and advocates will conduct the annual "point in time" census of homeless. Last January, there were 1,730 homeless people in Fairfax County at the "point in time" count, more than 1,000 of those are members of families, most of the adults with jobs. In the City of Alexandria, there were 360 homeless people. In Arlington, 527 homeless, about 200 of those were people in families.

According to the latest U.S. Census numbers, from 2008, there were about 200,000 people (under 65) in Northern Virginia without health insurance. These are people who can't get preventative care, can't get routine care for minor illnesses.

In Arlington County 38,018 or 21.1 percent of the population lacked health insurance. That number jumped to 62 percent of those living below 200 percent of poverty line.

In Fairfax County, 149,642 people or more than 16 percent of the population lacked health insurance. In the City of Alexandria, 22,399 people lack health insurance, or 18.2 percent of the population. In the City of Fairfax, 3,685 people lack health insurance, or 18.8 of the population.

Another measure of need, and a way of identifying concentrations of poverty, is to look at students who qualify for free or reduced-price

meals in public schools.

In Alexandria more than 50 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced meals.

In Arlington, more than one-third of students are eligible for free or reduced meals.

More than 37,000 students in Fairfax County Public Schools are eligible for free and reduced meals, that's 22 percent of the student body. And the needy students also tend to be concentrated in particular schools. For example, some schools, like Wolf Trap Elementary, had no students qualifying for free or reduced meals. Then consider Graham Road Elementary, with more than 78 percent of its students qualifying for free and reduced meals, Lynbrook Elementary with more than 76 percent of its students qualifying; Mount Vernon Woods, more than 75 percent; Mount Eagle more than 74 percent. The uneven distribution showed dozens of schools with very high rates of poor students lumped together; dozens with poverty rates in the single digits.

Food for thought. These numbers don't indicate a tiny population of needy people, they indicate a region with ongoing problems of "haves" and "have-nots." Those 15-30 percent of our populations in local jurisdictions who "have not" are about to have quite a bit less as the state and local budget processes move forward.

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### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### Support More Funding

To the Editor:

For the first time in anyone's memory, Fairfax County Public Schools is in the midst of a perfect storm. On the revenue side, the country is in recession, state revenues are down, and county home values have fallen. This year we are educating 4,000 more students than last year, with \$20 million less. The situation would be even worse had we not received nearly \$50 million in federal stimulus funds — and those funds will run out in a year. The new Governor and the General Assembly have to cut \$4 billion just to balance the state budget. The County Board of Supervisors funded the schools this year at the same level as last year — despite our increased enrollment — and threatens either the same or lower funding next year.

On the spending side, enrollment is up dramatically and the number of our neediest children — who cost more to educate — is growing even faster. In response, over the past two years, the School Board and Superintendent have taken prudent measures to control costs, including cutting central

administration by 15 percent, and streamlining and consolidating programs.

However, when we spend 85 percent of our budget on instruction, there is a finite limit to what we can cut without impacting teaching and learning. And the cuts that save the most money — freezing pay and raising class sizes — are both counterproductive and unsustainable. But that is where we have to cut to get to the numbers needed to balance our budget.

And so we face a crossroads. We can keep cutting — freshman sports, elementary band and strings, full-day kindergarten, more teaching positions that will raise class sizes, and again freezing all pay. Or we can advocate for the funding we need to maintain the world class school system that is not only nationally renowned, but which also fuels the economic engine that drives the county, and which contributes to the abundant quality of life we moved here to enjoy.

The School Board will make its choice on Feb. 4 when we will adopt a budget that seeks the resources we need to serve all 174,000 children who will walk through our doors next September. But then it is up to others — the

General Assembly, the Governor, and the Board of Supervisors — to decide whether we actually get those resources. You have a unique opportunity to affect the future of our children, schools and our community. Please join us in letting our elected officials know that you support Fairfax County Public Schools, and want those elected officials to provide us with the resources we need to maintain our very successful system. We invite you to learn more at [www.fcps.edu](http://www.fcps.edu) and step up to let your voice be heard.

**Kathy Smith**  
Chairman, Fairfax  
County School Board

#### Facts about Climate

To the Editor:

Mr. Hatch, in Centre View (Jan 7-13, 2010) sharply disagreed with Dr. Margaret Fisher's description of the impact that the expected change in the earth's climate "was probably the most serious environmental threat of all time." He deemed this statement "outrageous." He was also displeased with the conclusions presented by the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) which

indicate that the average temperature is increasing.

In his critique Mr. Hatch asserts that "natural sources of greenhouse gases" dwarf "anthropogenic (manmade) sources," and that "water vapor is by far the most important (greenhouse gas)." These statements are simply misleading. The facts are that "anthropogenic gases," primarily carbon dioxide add to natural sources, thereby increasing CO2 density that now exceeds maximum values that occurred during the previous half million years. Mr. Hatch has questioned Dr. Fisher's assertion that pollen increase will result from climate change. In fact evidence of changes in pollen levels and increased transport abound. For example measurements made in the Caribbean have revealed that pollen (and other stuff) originating in Africa are blown from the Sahara and the Niger region and deposited in the Caribbean. This material reaches coral reefs causing coral die off ...

There is a broadly accepted theory that guides projections of earth's climate properties. It is strongly supported by geologic data, analysis of glacial ice cores, tectonic circulations and proper

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