

## Interview: Howard Cullum



# Virginians are not thinking through the budget cuts

The Virginia General Assembly opened its 46-day annual legislative session in Richmond on Jan. 11. The principal agenda is Republican Gov. George Allen's proposed austerity budget, including a \$403 million cut in social services, education, the arts, and extension services, which he has combined with a reduction in middle-income taxation and a hefty increase in spending for prisons.

A leading opponent of these cuts has been Howard M. Cullum, Virginia Secretary of Health and Human Resources under former Democratic Gov. L. Douglas Wilder (1990-94). Mr. Cullum has been in public service in Virginia for 25 years. He has served as Virginia's Mental Health Commissioner, and before that ran the mental health programs in Virginia Beach. In the early and middle 1970s, he worked in human services in Fairfax and Arlington counties in the greater Washington, D.C. area. He is currently a consultant in the health and disability field and a member of the Community College Board of Virginia.

The Virginia plan has been described as a trial balloon and model for the national "Contract with America," which House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.), House Majority Leader Richard Armey (R-Tex.), and other anti-constitutional, "New Age" Republicans are seeking to push through the U.S. Congress. Virginia is also notorious, because it is in this state's penitentiaries that five of Lyndon LaRouche's political associates are still imprisoned with long sentences imposed for crimes they never committed—purely because of their political convictions.

These facts put an international spotlight on Virginia, which so often in its history has been the battleground between the stooges of the British oligarchy and the champions of American republican nation-building.

Mr. Cullum gave the interview reprinted below on Jan. 4 to *EIR's* local Northern Virginia weekly, *EIR News for Loudoun County*.

**EIR:** What is your view of Governor Allen's proposed budget and tax cut plan?

**Cullum:** The budget cuts are targeting some of the most vulnerable citizens—the poor and the handicapped, the disadvantaged, the elderly, and, in the health and human resources area, which has been my field, he's cutting 15,000 kids off from health care that the money was in the budget to do.

He's cutting money for in-home Meals on Wheels and care for the elderly. He's cutting \$6 million out of community programs for the mentally ill and mentally retarded, under some vague justification that people are getting services who somehow aren't disabled or are less disabled. No one knows what they're talking about, in a system of community-based care for the mentally disabled that's been marginal for the last 25 years.

He's eliminating funds in the health department that paid for drugs and care for people with chronic illnesses who didn't have Medicaid and didn't have any other health insurance. They had a little bit of money, a couple of million, that he's cut.

He's cut the developmental centers around the state where people could take a handicapped child they thought might have a diagnosis done, people who don't have their own doctors or pediatricians to refer them on. That's all proposed to be cut out.

**EIR:** What is motivating Governor Allen?

**Cullum:** It's very simple. The motivation of the whole budget package is the 1995 House and Senate elections, to get control of that. That's all this is about. Unfortunately, human beings are getting hit by it.

The reality of it is that demographically, Virginia is a conservative state and ultimately we'll have Republican domination, and he wants to move it up by getting the Democrats in a position of opposing a tax cut. Now, what fool would oppose a tax cut?

So this is a move to gain control earlier, by putting the Democrats in a box. It's basically building on the anti-government sentiment that's tied into the federal level, and translating that down to the state level.

Part of what the frustration is, is that there is going to have to be another half-billion-dollar cut this time next year, for the next cycle, which is already built into this budget.

But for my area, health and human services, it's *as if there are no other needs* in a growing state. This state's got about 2.3 million people. There are handicapped kids coming out of special education at 21 or 22. There are families, who have taken care of handicapped people, who are going to be dying in the next few years. There's always been a state responsibility to work with those families and have a system of care. That's what's in jeopardy.

What people are saying, if they know the arithmetic, is

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that there is really going to be nothing significant in education, nothing in transportation; he said he'll oppose any revenue increases to pay for anything on roads. There's to be nothing for the mentally disabled. He is basically cutting the disenfranchised people and feeding the money to people who are the most well-to-do.

**EIR:** You recently had a letter to the editor printed in the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* on this issue, and particularly focusing on the question of health care in Virginia under Allen's proposal.

**Cullum:** The newspaper used my name because they were making implications in an earlier editorial that, if people just didn't have to pay the state taxes, they would be able to pay for health care, and maybe they could get it on their own.

Well, the people I'm talking about, the million Virginians with no health care, the majority of them make less than \$25,000, and they're working. They're going to get \$150 a year [from a tax cut]. If they think they can buy health care for \$150 a year—they can't even buy it for a month!

I think what people are looking for, at least some of those who've been working in state and local government for the last 20-some years, is how about a little honesty? Basically, the legislators are being blackmailed to buy off a tax cut that's going to go through five years. About a third of the tax cut is going to go to the business community, the doctors, and the lawyers, and the accountants, and all the other people who really are hurting compared to the working poor! They're going to get a break.

It's clearly geared up to shake down the business community for massive contributions in next year's election. Because, if the Democrats say "no" to [eliminating] that BPOL [Business and Professional Operating License] tax, then they'll go and say, "We would have given you your tax break, but the Democrats stopped us." Then if they do get it through, they'll go to the people and say, "We need your campaign money, because look at the tax breaks we just gave you."

The question there, and especially in Northern Virginia where the BPOL tax [revenue is highest]—Arlington, Fairfax—five years from now, that goes to zero. There's a fantasy that these people can be efficient [to reduce the county budgets]. But most of that money goes to police, fire, and schools in Northern Virginia. So where are all of these massive economies going to come from?

The state employees get a 2.25% pay raise, and there isn't

any money. They're supposed to "find it by being efficient." After they've just been cut millions, they'll have to just balance the budget. On top of that, they're asked to be efficient. I know from having been the mental health commissioner in this state, talking about mental health alone for those 10,000 employees, they have to find about \$5 to \$7 million.

He should have told 16,000 state employees that the governor wants to get rid of, before he was running, that "If you elect me, I'm going to try to fire one out of every six of you." He should have told the persons like myself and other advocates for the mentally disabled that "If you elect me, I'll make sure there ain't a dime for the next decade." That's what would have really been honest. Then they run with that garbage of "honest change."

As long as a majority of people don't have to worry about the details, who can be against cutting taxes? If you stand in the way, you're going to get your head cut off politically, because the public is not going to think it through.

**EIR:** Over 800 people have come out to date at five public hearings to protest this. The Allen administration didn't orchestrate the hearings. Won't the Democrats be able to stop this in the legislature?

**Cullum:** They don't have guts enough, because they're afraid of the voters next November, and they're afraid of losing their majority. They think if maybe they don't do anything, they'll just slip by—as opposed to saying, "let's come up with an alternative budget. Let's really cut some things. Let's earmark some of this money for upgrading some of the infrastructure of this state and higher education, and let's do some things that are pro-active for the future."

**EIR:** In your letter to the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, you cite the fact that 1 million Virginians have no health insurance. Is that high for the nation?

**Cullum:** No, it's pretty much right in line. It's one out of six around the country, and it's growing, as people get downsized. The reality of it is that a quarter of a million are kids whose parents are working, but obviously don't have insurance with the job. The state was trying slowly to take little bites of that out, and that's what the governor just reneged on and pulled the money out. These are people at less than 100% of [official] poverty [level]. If you make over \$12,000 a year, you're too rich to even be part of this. That's the level of cuts, that's who it's hitting, people making less than \$12,000 a year!