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SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 140

Offered January 21, 2000

Establishing the Rural Virginia Prosperity Commission.

Patrons—Hawkins, Bolling, Forbes, Hanger, Houck, Lucas, Marye, Miller, K.G., Newman, Norment, Potts, Puckett, Quayle, Reynolds, Schrock, Stolle, Stosch, Trumbo, Wampler, Watkins and Williams

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, the U.S. economy is experiencing its longest economic expansion in history; and

WHEREAS, the Commonwealth as a whole has shared in this broad-based economic expansion which as brought to the Commonwealth double digit annual general fund revenue growth over the past few bienniums; and

WHEREAS, numerous areas of the Commonwealth are sharing this record growth where technology is generating unprecedented economic prosperity; and

WHEREAS, urban and suburban areas of the Commonwealth of Virginia have benefited from the growth and expansion of information technology; and

WHEREAS, even after almost ten years of strong economic growth in the Commonwealth, the rural areas of Virginia have not benefited to the same extent as the urban areas of Virginia; and

WHEREAS, the falling commodity prices for farm products have helped keep inflation under control but have reduced the income of farmers in Virginia's rural areas; and

WHEREAS, the assault on tobacco and its harmful effects has decimated the Southwest and Southside regions in Virginia with their historically strong economic dependence on tobacco; and

WHEREAS, increased global competition has helped some areas of the Commonwealth, the free trade policies of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) have hurt certain manufacturing industries, such as textiles, which are predominantly located in rural areas resulting in high unemployment; and

WHEREAS, the strong economies of the urban and suburban areas with their economic growth and high wage jobs have exacerbated the rural community's out-migration, especially for the younger residents of the rural parts of Virginia; and

WHEREAS, the social and economic problems confronting rural Virginia and its suburban neighbors, where rapid housing growth competes for space, land, and local services are diverse with different state policies and laws affecting different local economies in diverse ways, and therefore, strategies may need to be initiated and/or modified to provide maximum effectiveness for Virginia's rural and rural/suburban areas; and

WHEREAS, the Commonwealth cannot achieve full prosperity until all regions of the Commonwealth share in the state's current unprecedented economic growth and allow its communities and its citizens to reach their full potential; and

WHEREAS, rural economies that are not in a position to equally contribute to the Commonwealth's economic prosperity will inevitably require continuous fiscal contributions from urban and suburban areas of the state to simply continue to provide essential public services; and

WHEREAS, sustained rural development that improves a community's economy cannot occur until creative solutions which link strong resources and programs with a local capacity to tackle its own unique problems are developed; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That a Commission be created to undertake a detailed analysis of Virginia's rural economies and to recommend flexible but targeted state policies which, combined with local efforts, will help foster sustainable economic growth in Virginia's rural areas. The Commission shall study and recommend what policies and strategies can be instituted or restructured to help rebuild Virginia's rural economy to maximize the effectiveness of federal, state, local and private efforts to assure rural prosperity and a high quality of life in rural communities.

The Commission shall be comprised of twenty members. The membership of the Commission shall be comprised as follows: seven members of the House of Delegates and four citizen members of the Commonwealth all appointed by the Speaker of the House of Delegates, and five members of the Senate of Virginia and four citizen members appointed by the Senate Committee on Privileges and Elections. The Commission shall include representatives of both urban and rural areas of Virginia. The Chairman shall be elected by the membership at its first meeting.

The Division of Legislative Services and the Rural Economic Analysis Program at Virginia Tech shall provide staff assistance for the study. All agencies of the Commonwealth shall provide assistance to the Commission upon request.

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60 The direct cost of the study shall not exceed \$205,400 and there is hereby allocated \$175,000 from
61 the General Assembly's contingent fund to provide analytical, planning and advisory services for
62 Virginia Tech.

63 The Commission shall complete its work by December 1, 2001 and submit its findings and
64 recommendations to the Governor in the 2002 Session of the Virginia General Assembly. The
65 Commission shall submit its preliminary report and its recommendations to the Governor in the 2001
66 Session of the Virginia General Assembly as provided in the procedures of the Division of Legislative
67 Automated Systems for the processing of legislative documents.