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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 99

Offered January 11, 2006

Prefiled January 10, 2006

Establishing a joint subcommittee to study methods of increasing voter turnout in Virginia. Report.

Patron—Purkey

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, only 45 percent of Virginia's registered voters participated in the 2005 statewide and House of Delegates elections, continuing a pattern of slow decline; 46 percent voted in 2001 and 49.5 percent in 1997; and

WHEREAS, even in presidential election years, almost one-third of voters have not come to the polls in recent elections; 71 percent voted in 2004 and 68.5 percent in 2000; and

WHEREAS, voter interest is even lower for congressional, state legislative, and local elections in the "off-years" when there are no statewide contests; 39 percent voted in 2002, when an incumbent United States Senator was contested only by two little-known Independent candidates, and only 31 percent voted in the 2003 state legislative races; and

WHEREAS, municipal elections held in May historically have the lowest turnout of all; and

WHEREAS, lack of two-party competition and the strength of incumbency often are cited as reasons for low turnout, and the lack of contested elections has been particularly noticeable in Virginia; and

WHEREAS, many believe that the problem is compounded by "voter fatigue" from Virginia's election schedule, whereby voters are required to follow campaigns and go to the polls every year, and, in municipalities where most still hold local elections in May, to participate twice a year, not including nominating primaries that may accompany the general election; and

WHEREAS, the need not only to vote frequently but to follow campaigns and make choices for an extensive list of public offices also may be an issue; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That a joint subcommittee be established to study methods of increasing voter turnout in Virginia. The joint subcommittee shall have a total membership of 11 members that shall consist of six legislative members and five nonlegislative citizen members. Members shall be appointed as follows: four members of the House of Delegates to be appointed by the Speaker of the House of Delegates in accordance with the principles of proportional representation contained in the Rules of the House of Delegates; two members of the Senate to be appointed by the Senate Committee on Rules; three nonlegislative citizen members to be appointed by the Speaker of the House of Delegates; and two nonlegislative citizen members to be appointed by the Senate Committee on Rules. Nonlegislative citizen members of the joint subcommittee shall be citizens of the Commonwealth of Virginia. Unless otherwise approved in writing by the chairman of the joint subcommittee and the respective Clerk, nonlegislative citizen members shall only be reimbursed for travel originating and ending within the Commonwealth of Virginia for the purpose of attending meetings. If a companion joint resolution of the other chamber is agreed to, written authorization of both Clerks shall be required. The joint subcommittee shall elect a chairman and vice chairman from among its membership, who shall be members of the General Assembly.

In conducting its study, the joint subcommittee shall examine (i) the lack of competition in many districts and the impact of gerrymandering and the redistricting process, (ii) the number and frequency of elections in Virginia, (iii) the possible benefit of conducting all general elections in November, (iv) the possible benefit of allowing the Attorney General to be appointed by the Governor rather than elected, (v) the current process of electing commissioners of the revenue, treasurers, and sheriffs, and (vi) other factors that might be identified as contributing to Virginia's low turnout.

Administrative staff support shall be provided by the Office of the Clerk of the House of Delegates. Legal, research, policy analysis, and other services as requested by the joint subcommittee shall be provided by the Division of Legislative Services. All agencies of the Commonwealth shall provide assistance to the joint subcommittee for this study, upon request.

The joint subcommittee shall be limited to four meetings for the 2006 interim and four meetings for the 2007 interim, and the direct costs of this study shall not exceed \$8,000 for each year without approval as set out in this resolution. Approval for unbudgeted nonmember-related expenses shall require the written authorization of the chairman of the joint subcommittee and the respective Clerk. If a companion joint resolution of the other chamber is agreed to, written authorization of both Clerks shall be required.

No recommendation of the joint subcommittee shall be adopted if a majority of the House members

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59 or a majority of the Senate members appointed to the joint subcommittee (i) vote against the
60 recommendation and (ii) vote for the recommendation to fail notwithstanding the majority vote of the
61 joint subcommittee.

62 The joint subcommittee shall complete its meetings for the first year by November 30, 2006, and for
63 the second year by November 30, 2007, and the chairman shall submit to the Division of Legislative
64 Automated Systems an executive summary of its findings and recommendations no later than the first
65 day of the next Regular Session of the General Assembly for each year. Each executive summary shall
66 state whether the joint subcommittee intends to submit to the General Assembly and the Governor a
67 report of its findings and recommendations for publication as a House or Senate document. The
68 executive summaries and reports shall be submitted as provided in the procedures of the Division of
69 Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of legislative documents and reports and shall be
70 posted on the General Assembly's website.

71 Implementation of this resolution is subject to subsequent approval and certification by the Joint
72 Rules Committee. The Committee may approve or disapprove expenditures for this study, extend or
73 delay the period for the conduct of the study, or authorize additional meetings during the 2006 and 2007
74 interims.