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SENATE BILL NO. 9

Offered January 9, 2008

Prefiled November 28, 2007

A BILL to provide for the submission to the voters of a proposed amendment to Section 6 of Article X of the Constitution of Virginia, relating to property tax exemptions, including tax relief for certain homeowners.

Patrons—Whipple and Petersen; Delegate: Eisenberg

Referred to Committee on Privileges and Elections

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. § 1. It shall be the duty of the officers conducting the election directed by law to be held on the Tuesday after the first Monday in November 2008, at the places appointed for holding the same, to open a poll and take the sense of the qualified voters upon the ratification or rejection of the proposed amendment to the Constitution of Virginia, contained herein and in the joint resolution proposing such amendment, to wit:

Amend Section 6 of Article X of the Constitution of Virginia as follows:

ARTICLE X**TAXATION AND FINANCE****Section 6. Exempt property.**

(a) Except as otherwise provided in this Constitution, the following property and no other shall be exempt from taxation, State and local, including inheritance taxes:

(1) Property owned directly or indirectly by the Commonwealth or any political subdivision thereof, and obligations of the Commonwealth or any political subdivision thereof exempt by law.

(2) Real estate and personal property owned and exclusively occupied or used by churches or religious bodies for religious worship or for the residences of their ministers.

(3) Private or public burying grounds or cemeteries, provided the same are not operated for profit.

(4) Property owned by public libraries or by institutions of learning not conducted for profit, so long as such property is primarily used for literary, scientific, or educational purposes or purposes incidental thereto. This provision may also apply to leasehold interests in such property as may be provided by general law.

(5) Intangible personal property, or any class or classes thereof, as may be exempted in whole or in part by general law.

(6) Property used by its owner for religious, charitable, patriotic, historical, benevolent, cultural, or public park and playground purposes, as may be provided by classification or designation by an ordinance adopted by the local governing body and subject to such restrictions and conditions as provided by general law.

(7) Land subject to a perpetual easement permitting inundation by water as may be exempted in whole or in part by general law.

(b) The General Assembly may by general law authorize the governing body of any county, city, town, or regional government to provide for the exemption from local property taxation, or a portion thereof, within such restrictions and upon such conditions as may be prescribed, of real estate and personal property designed for continuous habitation owned by, and occupied as the sole dwelling of, persons not less than sixty-five years of age or persons permanently and totally disabled as established by general law who are deemed by the General Assembly to be bearing an extraordinary tax burden on said property in relation to their income and financial worth.

(c) Except as to property of the Commonwealth, the General Assembly by general law may restrict or condition, in whole or in part, but not extend, any or all of the above exemptions.

(d) The General Assembly may define as a separate subject of taxation any property, including real or personal property, equipment, facilities, or devices, used primarily for the purpose of abating or preventing pollution of the atmosphere or waters of the Commonwealth or for the purpose of transferring or storing solar energy, and by general law may allow the governing body of any county, city, town, or regional government to exempt or partially exempt such property from taxation, or by general law may directly exempt or partially exempt such property from taxation.

(e) The General Assembly may define as a separate subject of taxation household goods, personal effects and tangible farm property and products, and by general law may allow the governing body of any county, city, town, or regional government to exempt or partially exempt such property from taxation, or by general law may directly exempt or partially exempt such property from taxation.

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59 (f) Exemptions of property from taxation as established or authorized hereby shall be strictly
60 construed; provided, however, that all property exempt from taxation on the effective date of this section
61 shall continue to be exempt until otherwise provided by the General Assembly as herein set forth.

62 (g) The General Assembly may by general law authorize any county, city, town, or regional
63 government to impose a service charge upon the owners of a class or classes of exempt property for
64 services provided by such governments.

65 (h) The General Assembly may by general law authorize the governing body of any county, city,
66 town, or regional government to provide for a partial exemption from local real property taxation, within
67 such restrictions and upon such conditions as may be prescribed, (i) of real estate whose improvements,
68 by virtue of age and use, have undergone substantial renovation, rehabilitation or replacement or (ii) of
69 real estate with new structures and improvements in conservation, redevelopment, or rehabilitation areas.

70 (i) The General Assembly may by general law allow the governing body of any county, city, or town
71 to exempt or partially exempt from taxation any generating equipment installed after December
72 thirty-one, nineteen hundred seventy-four, for the purpose of converting from oil or natural gas to coal
73 or to wood, wood bark, wood residue, or to any other alternate energy source for manufacturing, and
74 any co-generation equipment installed since such date for use in manufacturing.

75 (j) The General Assembly may by general law allow the governing body of any county, city, or town
76 to have the option to exempt or partially exempt from taxation any business, occupational or
77 professional license or any merchants' capital, or both.

78 (k) *The General Assembly may by general law allow the governing body of any county, city, or town*
79 *to exempt or partially exempt from real property taxation or provide for the deferral of real property*
80 *taxes, within such restrictions and upon such conditions as may be prescribed by the governing body by*
81 *ordinance, of up to twenty percent of the value of residential or farm property that is designed for*
82 *continuous habitation and is occupied as the primary dwelling of the individual owners.*

83 § 2. The ballot shall contain the following question:

84 "Question: Shall Section 6 of Article X of the Constitution of Virginia be amended to authorize
85 legislation to permit localities to exempt, partially exempt, or defer from real property taxation up to
86 twenty percent of the value of residential or farm property that is designed for continuous habitation and
87 is occupied as the primary dwelling of the individual owners, within such restrictions and upon such
88 conditions as may be prescribed by the governing body by ordinance?"

89 The ballots shall be prepared, distributed and voted, and the results of the election shall be
90 ascertained and certified, in the manner prescribed by § 24.2-684 of the Code of Virginia. The State
91 Board of Elections shall comply with § 30-19.9 of the Code and shall cause to be sent to the electoral
92 boards of each county and city sufficient copies of the full text of the amendment and question
93 contained herein for the officers of election to post in each polling place on election day.

94 The electoral board of each county and city shall make out, certify and forward an abstract of the
95 votes cast for and against such proposed amendment in the manner now prescribed by law in relation to
96 votes cast in general elections.

97 The State Board of Elections shall open and canvass such abstracts and examine and report the
98 whole number of votes cast at the election for and against such amendment in the manner now
99 prescribed by law in relation to votes cast in general elections. The State Board of Elections shall record
100 a certified copy of such report in its office, and without delay make out and transmit to the Governor an
101 official copy of such report, certified by it. The Governor shall, without delay, make proclamation of the
102 result, stating therein the aggregate vote for and against the amendment.

103 If a majority of those voting vote in favor of the amendment, it shall become effective on January 1,
104 2009.

105 The expenses incurred in conducting this election shall be defrayed as in the case of election of
106 members of the General Assembly.