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# WASHINGTON BUSINESS JOURNAL

## OPINION

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### **Commit to specifics on outcomes, innovations**

[Paul R. Lawrence](#)

Special To Washington Business Journal

From a business perspective, the governor of Virginia is the CEO of a large company. With an annual budget of nearly \$18 billion, the commonwealth would be ranked 60th on the Fortune 500 if it were a company. In terms of revenue, the state government is larger than any company headquartered in Virginia except Mobil. It handles more than twice the revenue of Microsoft.

Given this, it may not be surprising that enhancing the competitiveness of Virginia will be a key issue in the race for governor. Candidates have translated this into the need for investment in better transportation and education. No doubt this resonates with area businessmen, who spend an increasing amount of time searching for highly trained employees and then persuading them to move here.

I challenge the candidates to speak directly about competitiveness. Tell me about specific outcomes you will produce and the innovations you will introduce. By focusing on outcomes and innovations, we will get a real sense of your stewardship over the commonwealth.

Let me offer examples of relevant outcomes. The best measure I have of the quality of the transportation system is my commuting time. Because it is taking me longer to get to work each year, I believe the transportation problem is increasing. If you support better transportation, one outcome I should see will be reduced commuting time. Tell me about your transportation plans by answering this simple question: Two years from the day you are inaugurated, how much shorter will my commute be because of your election?

Education involves many complex issues. A generally accepted method of measuring the quality of our education system is how Virginia students score on standardized tests, such as the SATs. If you champion education while governor, one outcome I should see is increased SAT scores. Address concerns about my children's education by answering this question: How much will Virginia high school students' SATs increase during your term?

In the past decade successful businesses have prospered by introducing and exploiting innovation. Some government agencies, albeit at a slower pace, also have introduced innovation in the way they provide service. One such innovation was the United Kingdom's Citizen Charter, which established specific remedies if the government service was not provided. An excellent example was the new "contract" between the government rail service and its customers. If their trips were late, they received a discount.


I'd like to hear each candidate discuss their views on the historically slow Department of Motor Vehicles. Would you support a Citizen Charter that includes this promise: If you wait in line at the DMV longer than 10 minutes, all fees will be half-price.

In the late 1980s, when Minnesota's education system faced challenges, it introduced charter schools. This led to greater parental involvement and innovation in programs, decision-making and accountability. What innovation would you introduce to Virginia's education system?

By talking about outcomes and innovation, candidates commit to specifics that enable voters to judge their performance. This will be a difficult discussion to hold. They prefer to talk about things we must do -- like pay taxes. By focusing on tax changes, candidates sidestep the opportunity to tell us how state government will be different during their four years. We may get more or less of it, but it will be the same government performing work as it has always done.

Actions, based on real commitment, will affect how good a transportation and educational system Virginia has. If these two areas define how competitive Virginia will be in the global economy, I suggest the candidates focus directly on them and specify the outcomes and innovations they will deliver.

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