

# THE VIRGINIA TEACHER

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## NOT TAXES FOR SCHOOLS, BUT INVESTMENT IN CHILDREN

**T**HERE are in Virginia 730,000 children of school age, all blessed with a certain degree of natural ability, waiting to be trained and cultivated at the hands of our educational system. They constitute our greatest asset, and a fall-down in our efforts to develop their talents and potentialities can only spell a slow, insufficient and humiliating growth in our Commonwealth.

Among all the states of the Union Virginia's rank in educational expenditures is as follows:

Average annual salaries of teachers, principals and supervisors, 34th.

Cost per pupil in average daily attendance, 40th.

School debt outstanding per pupil in average daily attendance, 40th.

Annual salaries of teachers, superintendents and principals—Virginia, \$779; New York, \$2,361; United States, \$1,227.

Cost per pupil, average daily attendance—Virginia, \$39.36; New York, \$137.69; United States, \$73.58.

School debt outstanding per pupil in average daily attendance—Virginia, \$40.27; New Jersey, \$304.74; United States, \$134.49.

If Virginia spent as much per pupil as the average state does, our school budget would be increased by \$18,000,000.

A study of the situation shows the following comparison relative to public schools in Virginia in 1870 (first year of the public school system) and those of 1936:

An address delivered before the students of the State Teachers College at Harrisonburg at their Winter Convocation, January 5.

Population, 1,224,930, as against 2,421,851; pupils of school age, five to twenty-one years, 403,404, as against pupils of school age, seven to nineteen years, 741,043; enrollment, 128,288, against 582,038; average daily attendance, 75,724, against 488,537; number of teachers, 3,014, against 17,142; average annual salary, \$136.75, against \$740; average session in months, 4.66, against 8.50; value of school property, \$211,166, against \$63,177,781; per cent of illiteracy, 36.4, against 12.7; school funds available, \$545,926.98, against \$23,695,456.29.

The question may be asked, "Is the State able to meet the expense of a reasonably adequate school program?" I insist that it is, provided the people know the facts and provided they realize that money spent to educate children is not a tax but the only permanent investment parents can make that will never decrease in value and will add to children's happiness as well as help build up prosperity of the state and nation.

Wisdom dictates that, in our budget of expenditures, we should place a reasonable part of our income to be applied to the training of our children, and thus prepare them to meet the battles of life in their day and generation.

If our citizenry could be made to think in this direction, there would be a swing away from the tempting and devious ways of the Wall Street stock market, where men have lost in the last ninety days in depreciated stocks and bonds, through error in judgment, over \$35,000,000,000, a sum equal to the gross national debt that has accumulated from the beginning of our Government up to the present.

There are 351,237 passenger cars and 53,410 trucks in Virginia, and the state collections from these automobiles for 1937

will amount to \$6,000,000. Gross gas tax collections for this year are \$17,500,000, from which certain departmental and other deductions are to be made.

In 1924, during my regime as Governor, that being the first full year of gas collections, the sum amounted to only \$3,313,000; this sum has jumped to \$17,500,000. There has been collected in total gas tax between July 1, 1923, and 1937 approximately \$144,751,000.

It is estimated that it costs for ownership and operation of the 351,237 passenger cars between \$275,000 and \$290,000 per day, compared to our total expenditure for education purposes per day of \$140,000.

We read that the people of Virginia have paid in profit over and above the cost of alcoholic beverages in the state this year more than \$6,000,000.

The per capita cost of government in Virginia is \$44, while in other states it is \$77. The net per capita combined indebtedness of government units in Virginia is \$74 against an average in other states of \$141.

Virginia pays 3 79/100 per cent of the total revenue collected in the United States, while its population is only 2.7 per cent.

Virginia's financial standing shows that we have an aggregate taxable value of all property in Virginia, as of January 1, 1936, of \$2,080,389,000. Our gross debt, as of June 30, 1937, was \$22,608,000, and against this we have sinking fund holdings that are valued at \$5,005,000, thus showing a net debt, as of June 30, 1937, of \$17,603,000, a very small state indebtedness for as rich a state as Virginia.

The total interest charges for the fiscal year ended June 30, 1937, amounted to \$716,066. We are proud of the fact that, since 1929 and through the depression, our public debt has been reduced \$3,000,000.

The proposition the people of Virginia must decide is how far the state should attempt to go in meeting the needs of a capably managed, well-rounded Commonwealth.

The fact remains that we cannot have government activities that spell for health, education, happiness and the suitable development of our Commonwealth without being willing to pay the bill.

Two things first must be determined before it is decided whether a new or a continued tax shall be placed upon the people to support the school program. These are, first—whether there is a reasonable need for the objective aimed at, and second—whether the tax levied will yield a return in its various benefits that will be greater than the tax levied.

The state legislators are men of character and integrity who want to do what the taxpayers want done, but they can learn what is wanted of them only by "an expressed and thunderous public opinion."

The three-point program is, first—competent and adequately paid teachers; second—free textbooks, "which will constitute a saving of tens of thousands of dollars each year to the taxpayers"; and third—an actuarially sound pension system for the aged and infirm teachers.

Members of the General Assembly, I am sure, have sufficient courage and patriotism, forgetting their own personal political ambitions, to do by legislative act that which to them is worth while, let the chips fall where they may.

That which may seem like an extra burden at the time it is established will soon be forgotten if the results obtained prove the wisdom of the act itself.

When the parents of Virginia realize that a reasonable increased expenditure, which must necessarily come out of their pockets, is giving them a nine-month school with really competent teachers and suitable quarters, any criticism that may have been offered in the beginning will vanish like a dream and turn itself into a halo of praise.

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