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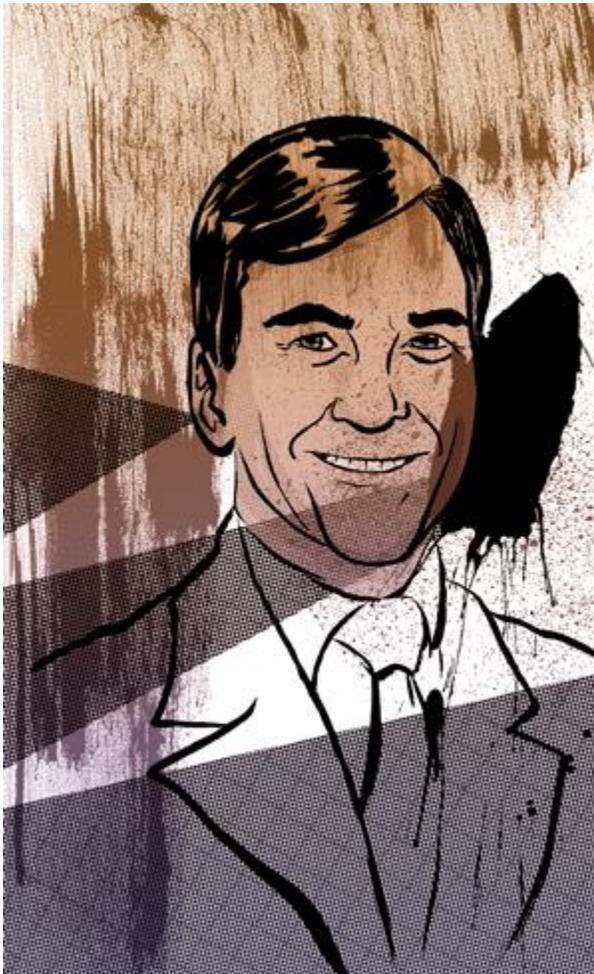


Governors' Forum

A selection of Southern governors address our concerns about the future.

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GOVERNOR BOB MCDONNELL, VIRGINIA



THE OXFORD AMERICAN: What could be your state's most outstanding accomplishment by 2050?

GOV. BOB MCDONNELL: I don't want to limit the Commonwealth of Virginia to just one accomplishment. To do so would not be in keeping with our legacy as the home of Washington, Jefferson, Henry, Maggie Walker, Booker T. Washington, American Independence, Yorktown, Appomattox, Tom Wolfe and the world's best ham and peanuts! In 2050, I want Virginia to have the lowest unemployment rate in the country, an active and thriving commercial spaceport at Wallops Island on our Eastern Shore, globally recognized film and wine industries, the best public education system in the world with opportunities for all our young people, and a vibrant tourism industry. I want to see a Virginia that is the home of the United States military, the global leader in energy and technology, and the site of the largest and most efficient port in the country. In short, I want the Virginia of 2050 to still be notable for our past, but even more noteworthy for our present and future.

THE OA: What could be your state's biggest challenge in 2050?

GOV. BM: Virginia is a diverse and large state. We are home to small coastal communities, bustling urban centers, and mountainous rural counties. Residents of Lee County, in far Southwest Virginia, are closer to nine other state capitals than they are to Richmond. However, roughly sixty-six percent of our population can be found in the "urban crescent" that stretches from Alexandria and Arlington through Richmond and down to Hampton Roads. Between 2010 and 2035, the Commonwealth's population is expected to increase by thirty-three percent, to approximately 10.5 million residents. That growth will occur predominately in that same urban crescent. The challenge then, for the elected leaders of today and 2050, is how do we continue to grow and move forward as one Commonwealth? How will we ensure that as the state grows collectively larger our different regions don't grow separately apart? We must retain the "common" in our Commonwealth, and in a big state with needs that can differ greatly by area that is a real challenge we must successfully address. All our citizens must have great opportunities to live the American Dream, no matter where they call home.

THE OA: Which industry, currently quiet, could be booming in your state in 2050?

GOV. BM: Though it's hardly quiet, Virginia's fast growing wine industry has not yet attracted nearly the attention it deserves. The Commonwealth is now the fifth largest wine-producing state in the country and the seventh largest commercial grape producer. We now have more than 160 wineries located throughout all the beautiful regions of the state. Wineries Unlimited and the North American Wine Bloggers announced recently that both of their organizations will hold their respective annual meetings in Virginia next year. With our outstanding Cabernet Francs and Viogniers leading the way, Virginia is quickly achieving a reputation as being home to some of the top wines not only in America, but the world. Thomas Jefferson's hobby has become big business in the Commonwealth, and in 2050, I expect Virginia wine to be sought out in restaurants and markets across the globe. In addition, I expect Virginia will have long been established at the premier East Coast destination of wine tourism, much the way California is today on the West Coast.

THE OA: How can public education be improved by 2050?

GOV. BM: I believe Virginia can be the most highly educated state in the nation by 2050, an accomplishment that will mean more good-paying jobs, higher incomes, and an even better quality of life for our citizens. We are already home to some of the nation's top universities, and our public education system continues to receive top rankings. Now, we are building on this success by committing the Commonwealth to more innovation in our K-12 system, providing training and new opportunities for our existing workforce, and ensuring greater access and affordability in our higher education system. We will expand high-quality charter schools, bring dynamic virtual learning programs to our classrooms, and open college laboratory schools. We will also focus on introducing more Virginia students to the subject areas powering the global economy of tomorrow—especially the "STEM" disciplines of science, technology, engineering and math. Our plan to award 100,000 additional college degrees over the next fifteen years will further position Virginia as a national leader in educational attainment. We cannot tolerate a single underperforming school in the Commonwealth. A good education is the prerequisite for a good job, and we are committed to making Virginia America's "Jobs Leader."

THE OA: What is the biggest problem in your state now, and how can it be resolved by 2050?

GOV. BM: Virginians need and deserve good-paying and rewarding jobs in the communities they call home. While our unemployment rate is below the national average, and we have announced a number of new job-creating private sector projects in the past

few months, we have much work ahead. My focus as governor is to ensure that state government does everything necessary to help the private sector create good jobs and grow the economy, and after that, get out of the way! The current economic downturn has been tough on Virginia families, businesses and government. As we navigate our way through it, we should act not only to improve our current situation, but also to ensure that we are well prepared for the future. That is why we closed an historic budget shortfall in Virginia through realistic forecasting and spending reductions, not tax increases. It is why we are focused on eliminating unnecessary regulations and impediments to free enterprise and reforming state government to make it smaller, simpler, and more efficient. That is how we will help business owners to grow and expand their enterprises, employing our citizens and revitalizing our economy. And the benefits of our actions today will continue to be felt in 2050 and long after that.