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## **CSO Funding Needs to Rise Above Politics**

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Will it be politics as usual in the Virginia House of Delegates this year? Or will the lawmakers set aside last year's partisanship in favor of the best interests of Lynchburg and the state environment?

The issue that will confront them soon will be state funding for the city's combined sewer overflow project, a monumental - and hugely expensive - effort to separate the stormwater and sewage lines to prevent raw sewage from being dumped into the James River.

The project is expected to cost another \$300 million. Some \$35 million of that would come from the state in the next decade under legislation approved by the full Senate last week. State Sen. Steve Newman, R-Forest, gained unanimous approval of his bill that would provide a significant source of revenue for the city project.

For Lynchburg, as The News & Advance has reported, that sum of money could triple if federal and local governments match the state money.

CSO money is important to Lynchburg because it affects the sewer rates and fees paid by city residents. The money is important to the state because Lynchburg, along with Richmond, is a major contributor to pollution in the Chesapeake Bay, especially during periods of heavy rainfall when raw sewage is combined with the stormwater runoff and discharged directly into the James River.

Newman pointed out in debate on the Senate floor that the state has spent millions of dollars on cleaning up the bay and that not funding the CSO project is counterproductive to that effort.

City Manager Kimball Payne said the city is grateful for Newman's efforts in the Senate, adding, "Unanimous approval of the Senate is really an accomplishment."

Newman acknowledged that the 39-0 vote will help in the House, but said "there's still a long way to go."

That was a reference to last year's defeat of \$3.75 million in CSO money for the city by the Republican majority in the House. Most observers agreed that House refusal to put up the money in the budget, which had been approved by the Senate and recommended by Gov. Timothy M. Kaine, was political punishment directed at then-newly elected Del. Shannon Valentine, a Lynchburg Democrat.

The House majority was still smarting over what it viewed as Republican Del. Preston Bryant's defection to Kaine's Cabinet as his secretary of Natural Resources. The House added some insult to the budget vote last year by approving CSO money for Richmond.

So will there be a change of heart this time around in favor of the bill that would also benefit Richmond, which has a combined sewer overflow problem similar to Lynchburg's?

Sen. John Chichester, R-Fredericksburg, alluded to the partisan problem in the House when he told his Senate Agriculture Committee colleagues, "This has been a political and financial football for years. We've got to quit it."

He's right. The House majority should stifle its partisan ways and approve the CSO money for Lynchburg. In so doing, it will not only help the residents of Lynchburg and surrounding counties who use the city's sewage system, it will also help clean up the James River and the Chesapeake Bay into which the river flows.

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