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# Local lawmakers say McAuliffe bond package could be revised

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Posted: Sunday, December 13, 2015 12:00 am

Bob Stuart

Gov. Terry McAuliffe's proposed \$2.43 billion bond package unveiled last week is chock full of funding for higher education and state parks, but area legislators say revisions to the package may be necessary.

The more than \$1 billion in targeted expenditures for college, university and community colleges has the goal of strengthening workforce development.

Del. Dickie Bell is pleased that the \$214 million for community colleges includes funding for a bioscience program at Blue Ridge Community College.

The delegate is less sure about the nearly \$850 million for funding at four-year institutions supporting research, building classroom capacity in STEM-related fields and updating campus infrastructure.

"I am glad Blue Ridge is getting their money," said Bell, R-Staunton. "But as for these continued capital investments at state colleges and universities, I'm worried they will be underused when completed."



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Bell said the investment in community colleges is timely for workforce development. "We're kind of trending that way now," he said. "There is such a demand for skilled workers in so many fields. There is less demand for college graduates."

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Del. Steve Landes, R-Weyers Cave, said the proposed bioscience investment at Blue Ridge makes perfect sense.

He said because James Madison University already has a bioscience program, the addition of one at Blue Ridge would offer transfer opportunities. And Landes said Blue Ridge's bioscience program would offer certification programs for lab technicians and other specialties.

Sen. Emmett Hanger, R-Weyers Cave, is pleased with some of provisions of the bond package and concerned about others.

Hanger is glad to see \$59 million in state funding to help wastewater treatment plants meet nutrient pollution reductions of phosphorous and nitrogen for the continued Chesapeake Bay cleanup.

As incoming co-chair of the Senate Finance Committee, Hanger is less sure about a proposed \$350 million investment for the Port of Virginia to enhance capacity and operations in Norfolk. Part of the justification for the enhanced port is increased cargo from the widening of the Panama Canal. And while Hanger is a supporter of Virginia's state parks, he questions spending \$140 million to develop parks and enhance and repair them.

"We have to staff state parks," he said. "We have had more of an appetite to build than to staff and maintain them."

Hanger said House and Senate committees have similar project priority lists to McAuliffe's.

"We will be taking a close look to see if we agree," Hanger said. "On colleges and universities, we have developed similar priority lists."

When announcing the bond package as a preview of his upcoming budget, McAuliffe stressed the need to invest in projects that would contribute to building the new Virginia economy.

The governor has repeatedly said during his two years in office that the new Virginia economy must be diverse and one less dependent on federal spending.

You may contact Bob Stuart at (540) 932-3562 or [bstuart@newsvirginian.com](mailto:bstuart@newsvirginian.com).

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